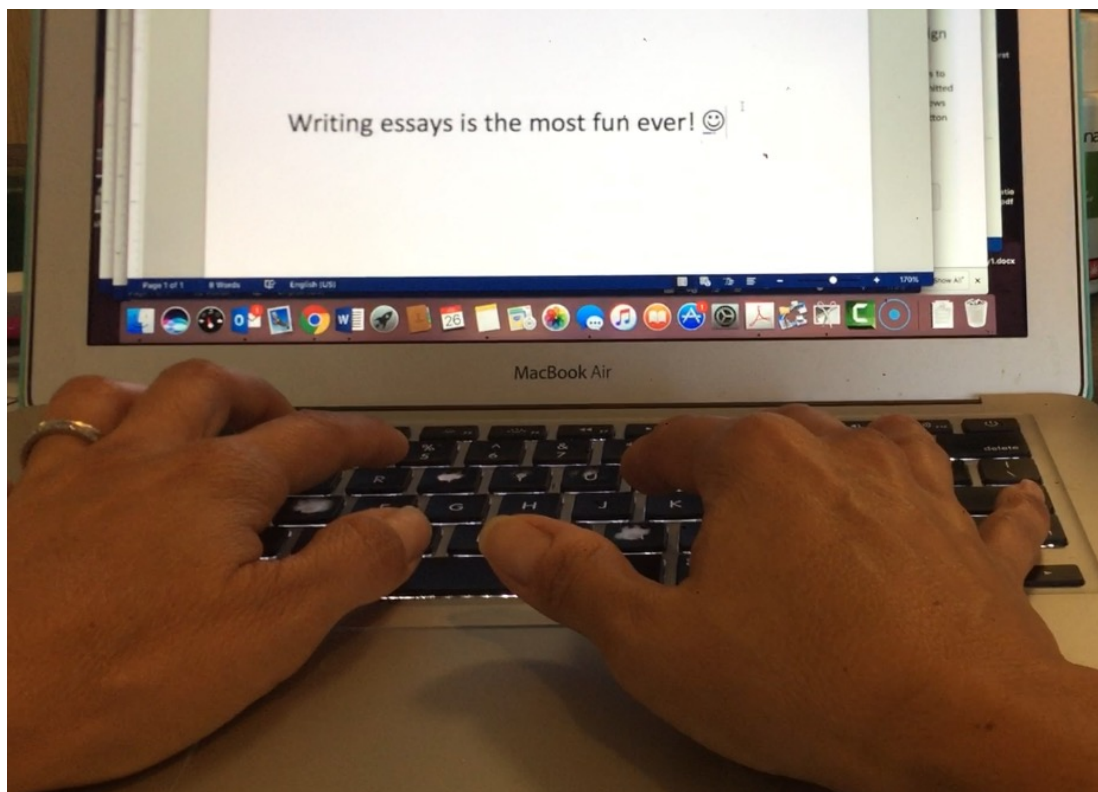


ENGLISH 1 OER TEXTBOOK

Edited by Angelina Misaghi – *Updated August 2018*



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Part 1: Situation and Analysis

The process of preparing to write is as important as the drafting process itself; in many cases, it's more important. Yet this is the process that most of us will skip when in a rush, preferring to dive directly into the writing part of any given writing assignment.

Here, through a few excellent readings, we'll look at the value of starting early; of considering a college writing assignment thoroughly to avoid the misunderstandings that lead to costly rewrites and failing grades; and of considering your audience and final purpose before pen (or keyboard) connects to paper.

Our first section on pre-writing also serves as a review of active reading, the most critical skill for college (and daily life) survival that we teach.

What Does the Professor Want? Understanding the Assignment

Amy Gupta

Learning Objectives

- Understand assignment parameters
- Understand the rhetorical situation

Writing for whom? Writing for what?

The first principle of good communication is knowing your audience. This is where writing papers for class gets kind of weird. As Peter Elbow explains:

When you write for a teacher you are usually swimming against the stream of natural communication. The natural direction of communication is to explain what you understand to someone who doesn't understand it. But in writing an essay for a teacher your task is usually to explain what you are still engaged in trying to understand to someone who understands it better.

Often when you write for an audience of one, you write a letter or email. But college papers aren't written like letters; they're written like articles for a hypothetical group of readers that you don't actually know much about. There's a fundamental mismatch between the real-life audience and the form your writing takes. It's kind of bizarre, really.

It helps to remember the key tenet of the university model: you're a junior scholar joining the academic community. Academic papers, in which scholars report the results of their research and thinking to one another, are the lifeblood of the scholarly world, carrying useful ideas and information to all parts of the academic corpus. Unless there is a particular audience specified in the assignment, you would do well to imagine yourself writing for a group of peers who have some

introductory knowledge of the field but are unfamiliar with the specific topic you're discussing. Imagine them being interested in your topic but also busy; try to write something that is well worth your readers' time. Keeping an audience like this in mind will help you distinguish common knowledge in the field from that which must be defined and explained in your paper. Understanding your audience like this also resolve the audience mismatch that Elbow describes. As he notes, "You don't write to teachers, you write for them."

Student Advice

Don't be scared whenever you are given an assignment. Professors know what it was like to be in college and write all kinds of papers. They aren't trying to make your lives difficult, but it is their jobs to make us think and ponder about many things. Take your time and enjoy the paper. Make sure you answer the question being asked rather than rant on about something that is irrelevant to the prompt. — Timothée Pizarro

Another basic tenet of good communication is clarifying the purpose of the communication and letting that purpose shape your decisions. Your professor wants to see you work through complex ideas and deepen your knowledge through the process of producing the paper. Each assignment—be it an argumentative paper, reaction paper, reflective paper, lab report, discussion question, blog post, essay exam, project proposal, or what have you—is ultimately about your learning. To succeed with writing assignments (and benefit from them) you first have to understand their learning-related purposes. As you write for the hypothetical audience of peer junior scholars, you're demonstrating to your professor how far you've gotten in analyzing your topic.

Professors don't assign writing lightly. Grading student writing is generally the hardest, most intensive work instructors do. With every assignment they give you, professors assign themselves many, many hours of demanding and tedious work that has to be completed while they are also preparing for each class meeting, advancing their scholarly and creative work, advising students, and serving on committees. Often, they're grading your papers on evenings and weekends because the conventional work day is already saturated with other obligations.

You would do well to approach every assignment by putting yourself in the shoes of your instructor and asking yourself, “Why did she give me this assignment? How does it fit into the learning goals of the course? Why is this question/topic/problem so important to my professor that he is willing to spend evenings and weekends reading and commenting on several dozen novice papers on it?”

Most instructors do a lot to make their pedagogical (teaching) goals and expectations transparent to students: they explain the course learning goals associated with assignments, provide grading rubrics in advance, and describe several strategies for succeeding. Other professors ... not so much. Some students perceive more open-ended assignments as evidence of a lazy, uncaring, or even incompetent instructor. Not so fast! Professors certainly vary in the quantity and specificity of the guidelines and suggestions they distribute with each writing assignment. Some professors make a point to give very few parameters about an assignment—perhaps just a topic and a length requirement—and they likely have some good reasons for doing so. Here are some possible reasons:

They figured it out themselves when they were students. Unsurprisingly, your instructors were generally successful students who relished the culture and traditions of higher education so much that they strove to build an academic career. The current emphasis on student-centered instruction is relatively recent; your instructors much more often had professors who adhered to the classic model of college instruction: they gave lectures together with, perhaps, one or two exams or papers. Students were on their own to learn the lingo and conventions of each field, to identify the key concepts and ideas within readings and lectures, and to sleuth out instructors’ expectations for written work. Learning goals, rubrics, quizzes, and preparatory assignments were generally rare.

They think figuring it out yourself is good for you. Because your professors by and large succeeded in a much less supportive environment, they appreciate how learning to thrive in those conditions gave them life-long problem-solving skills. Many think you should be able to figure it out yourself and that it would be good practice for you to do so. Even those who do include a lot of guidance with writing assignments sometimes worry that they’re depriving you of an important personal and intellectual challenge. Figuring out unspoken expectations is a valuable skill in itself.

They’re egg-heads. Many of your instructors have been so immersed in their fields that they may struggle to remember what it

was like to encounter a wholly new discipline for the first time. The assumptions, practices, and culture of their disciplines are like the air they breathe; so much so that it is hard to describe to novices. They may assume that a verb like “analyze” is self-evident, forgetting that it can mean very different things in different fields. As a student, you voluntarily came to study with the scholars, artists, and writers at your institution. Rightly or wrongly, the burden is ultimately on you to meet them where they are.

Professors value academic freedom; that is, they firmly believe that their high-level expertise in their fields grants them the privilege of deciding what is important to focus on and how to approach it. College professors differ in this way from high school teachers who are usually obligated to address a defined curriculum. Professors are often extremely wary of anything that seems to threaten academic freedom. Some see specified learning goals and standardized rubrics as the first step in a process that would strip higher education of its independence, scholarly innovation, and sense of discovery. While a standardized set of expectations and practices might make it easier to earn a degree, it’s also good to consider the benefits of the more flexible and diversified model.

It is understandably frustrating when you feel you don’t know how to direct your efforts to succeed with an assignment. However, except for rare egregious situations, you would do well to assume the best of your instructor and to appreciate the diversity of learning opportunities you have access to in college. Like one first-year student told Keith Hjortshoj, “I think that every course, every assignment, is a different little puzzle I have to solve. What do I need to do here? When do I need to do it, and how long will it take? What does this teacher expect of me?” The transparency that you get from some professors—along with guides like this one—will be a big help to you in situations where you have to be scrappier and more pro-active, piecing together the clues you get from your professors, the readings, and other course documents.

The prompt: what does “analyze” mean anyway?

Often, the handout or other written text explaining the assignment—what professors call the assignment prompt—will explain the purpose of the assignment, the required parameters (length, number and type of sources, referencing style, etc.), and the criteria for evaluation. Sometimes, though—especially when you are new to a field—you will encounter the baffling situation in which you

comprehend every single sentence in the prompt but still have absolutely no idea how to approach the assignment. No one is doing anything wrong in a situation like that. It just means that further discussion of the assignment is in order. Here are some tips:

Focus on the verbs. Look for verbs like “compare,” “explain,” “justify,” “reflect” or the all-purpose “analyze.” You’re not just producing a paper as an artifact; you’re conveying, in written communication, some intellectual work you have done. So the question is, what kind of thinking are you supposed to do to deepen your learning?

Put the assignment in context. Many professors think in terms of assignment sequences. For example, a social science professor may ask you to write about a controversial issue three times: first, arguing for one side of the debate; second, arguing for another; and finally, from a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective, incorporating text produced in the first two assignments. A sequence like that is designed to help you think through a complex issue. Another common one is a scaffolded research paper sequence: you first propose a topic, then prepare an annotated bibliography, then a first draft, then a final draft, and, perhaps, a reflective paper. The preparatory assignments help ensure that you’re on the right track, beginning the research process long before the final due date, and taking the time to consider recasting your thesis, finding additional sources, or reorganizing your discussion.⁵ If the assignment isn’t part of a sequence, think about where it falls in the semester, and how it relates to readings and other assignments. Are there headings on the syllabus that indicate larger units of material? For example, if you see that a paper comes at the end of a three-week unit on the role of the Internet in organizational behavior, then your professor likely wants you to synthesize that material in your own way. You should also check your notes and online course resources for any other guidelines about the workflow. Maybe you got a rubric a couple weeks ago and forgot about it. Maybe your instructor posted a link about “how to make an annotated bibliography” but then forgot to mention it in class.

Try a free-write. When I hand out an assignment, I often ask students to do a five-minute or ten-minute free-write. A free-write is when you just write, without stopping, for a set period of time. That doesn’t sound very “free;” it actually sounds kind of coerced. The “free” part is what you write—it can be whatever comes to mind. Professional writers use free-writing to get started on a challenging (or distasteful) writing task or to overcome writers block or a powerful

urge to procrastinate. The idea is that if you just make yourself write, you can't help but produce some kind of useful nugget. Thus, even if the first eight sentences of your free write are all variations on "I don't understand this" or "I'd really rather be doing something else," eventually you'll write something like "I guess the main point of this is ..." and—booyah!—you're off and running. As an instructor, I've found that asking students to do a brief free-write right after I hand out an assignment generates useful clarification questions. If your instructor doesn't make time for that in class, a quick free-write on your own will quickly reveal whether you need clarification about the assignment and, often, what questions to ask.

Ask for clarification the right way. Even the most skillfully crafted assignments may need some verbal clarification, especially because students' familiarity with the field can vary enormously. Asking for clarification is a good thing. Be aware, though, that instructors get frustrated when they perceive that students want to skip doing their own thinking and instead receive an exact recipe for an A paper. Go ahead and ask for clarification, but try to convey that you want to learn and you're ready to work. In general, avoid starting a question with "Do we have to ..." because I can guarantee that your instructor is thinking, "You don't have to do crap. You're an adult. You chose college. You chose this class. You're free to exercise your right to fail." Similarly, avoid asking the professor about what he or she "wants." You're not performing some service for the professor when you write a paper. What they "want" is for you to really think about the material.

**Potentially
Annoying
Questions**

Preferable Alternatives

I don't get it. Can you explain this more? or What do you want us to do?

I see that we are comparing and contrasting these two cases. What should be our focus? Their causes? Their impacts? Their implications? All of those things? or I'm unfamiliar with how art historians analyze a painting. Could you say more about what questions I should have in mind to do this kind of analysis?

How many sources do we have to cite?

Is there a typical range for the number of sources a well written paper would cite for this assignment? or Could you say more about what the sources are for? Is it more that we're analyzing these texts in this paper, or are we using these texts to analyze some other case?

What do I have to do to get an A on this paper?

Could I meet with you to get feedback on my (pre-prepared) plans/outline/thesis/draft? or I'm not sure how to approach this assignment. Are there any good examples or resources you could point me to?

Rubrics as road maps

If a professor provides a grading rubric with an assignment prompt, thank your lucky stars (and your professor). If the professor took the trouble to prepare and distribute it, you can be sure that he or she will use it to grade your paper. He or she may not go over it in class, but it's the clearest possible statement of what the professor is looking for in the paper. If it's wordy, it may seem like those online "terms and conditions" that we routinely accept without reading. But you really should read it over carefully before you begin and again as your work progresses. A lot of rubrics do have some useful specifics. Mine, for example, often contain phrases like "makes at least six error-free connections to concepts or ideas from the course," or "gives thorough consideration to at least one plausible counter-argument." Even less specific criteria (such as "incorporates course concepts" and "considers counter-arguments") will tell you how you should be spending your writing time.

Even the best rubrics aren't completely transparent. They simply can't be. Even well-written, nationally admired rubrics may still seem kind of vague. Take, for example, the Association of American Universities and Colleges critical thinking rubric as an example, what is the real difference between "demonstrating a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose" and "demonstrating adequate consideration" of the same? It depends on the specific context. So how can you know whether you've done that? A big part of what you're learning, through feedback from your professors, is to judge the quality of your writing for yourself. Your future bosses are counting on that. At this point, it is better to think of rubrics as roadmaps, displaying your destination, rather than a GPS system directing every move you make.

Behind any rubric is the essential goal of higher education: helping you take charge of your own learning, which means writing like an independently motivated scholar. Are you tasked with proposing a research paper topic? Don't just tell the professor what you want to do, convince him or her of the salience of your topic, as if you were a scholar seeking grant money. Is it a reflection paper? Then outline both the insights you've gained and the intriguing questions that remain, as a scholar would. Are you writing a thesis-driven analytical paper? Then apply the concepts you've learned to a new problem or situation. Write as if your scholarly peers around the country are eagerly awaiting your unique insights. Descriptors like "thoroughness" or "mastery" or "detailed attention" convey the vision of student writers making the time and rigorous mental effort to offer something new to the ongoing, multi-stranded academic conversation. What your professor wants, in short, is critical thinking.

What's critical about critical thinking?

Critical thinking is one of those terms that has been used so often and in so many different ways that it often seems meaningless. It also makes one wonder, is there such a thing as uncritical thinking? If you aren't thinking critically, then are you even thinking?

Despite the prevalent ambiguities, critical thinking actually does mean something. The Association of American Colleges and Universities usefully defines it as "a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion."

That definition aligns with the best description of critical thinking I ever heard; it came from my junior high art teacher, Joe Bolger. He

once asked us, “What color is the ceiling?” In that withering tween tone, we reluctantly replied, “Whiiiiite.” He then asked, “What color is it really?” We deigned to aim our pre-adolescent eyes upwards, and eventually began to offer more accurate answers: “Ivory?” “Yellow-ish tan.” “It’s grey in that corner.”

After finally getting a few thoughtful responses, Mr. Bolger said something like, “Making good art is about drawing what you see, not what you think you’re supposed to see.” The AAC&U definition, above, essentially amounts to the same thing: taking a good look and deciding what you really think rather than relying on the first idea or assumption that comes to mind.

The critical thinking rubric produced by the AAC&U describes the relevant activities of critical thinking in more detail. To think critically, one must ...

(a) “clearly state and comprehensively describe the issue or problem”

(b) “independently interpret and evaluate sources”

(c) “thoroughly analyze assumptions behind and context of your own or others’ ideas”

(d) “argue a complex position and one that takes counter-arguments into account”

(e) “arrive at logical and well informed conclusions”

While you are probably used to providing some evidence for your claims, you can see that college-level expectations go quite a bit further. When professors assign an analytical paper, they don’t just want you to formulate a plausible-sounding argument. They want you to dig into the evidence, think hard about unspoken assumptions and the influence of context, and then explain what you really think and why.

Interestingly, the AAC&U defines critical thinking as a “habit of mind” rather than a discrete achievement. And there are at least two reasons to see critical thinking as a craft or art to pursue rather than a task to check off. First, the more you think critically, the better you get at it. As you get more and more practice in closely examining claims, their underlying logic, and alternative perspectives on the issue, it’ll begin to feel automatic. You’ll no longer make or accept claims that begin with “Everyone knows that ...” or end with “That’s just human nature.” Second, just as artists and craftspersons hone their skills over a lifetime, learners continually expand their critical thinking capacities, both through the feedback they get from others and their own reflections. Artists of all kinds find satisfaction in continually

seeking greater challenges. Continual reflection and improvement is part of the craft.

Critical thinking is hard work. Even those who actively choose to do it experience it as tedious, difficult, and sometimes surprisingly emotional. Nobel-prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman explains that our brains aren't designed to think; rather, they're designed to save us from having to think. Our brains are great at developing routines and repertoires that enable us to accomplish fairly complex tasks like driving cars, choosing groceries, and having a conversation without thinking consciously and thoroughly about every move we make. Kahneman calls this "fast thinking." "Slow thinking," which is deliberate and painstaking, is something our brains seek to avoid. That built-in tendency can lead us astray. Kahneman and his colleagues often used problems like this one in experiments to gauge how people used fast and slow thinking in different contexts:

- A bat and ball cost \$1.10.
- The bat costs one dollar more than the ball.
- How much does the ball cost?

Most people automatically say the ball costs \$0.10. However, if the bat costs \$1 more, than the bat would cost \$1.10 leading to the incorrect total of \$1.20. The ball costs \$0.05. Kahneman notes, "Many thousands of university students have answered the bat-and-ball puzzle, and the results are shocking. More than 50% of students at Harvard, MIT, and Princeton gave the intuitive—incorrect—answer." These and other results confirm that "many people are overconfident, prone to place too much faith in their intuitions." Thinking critically—thoroughly questioning your immediate intuitive responses—is difficult work, but every organization and business in the world needs people who can do that effectively. Some students assume that an unpleasant critical thinking experience means that they're either doing something wrong or that it's an inherently uninteresting (and oppressive) activity. While we all relish those times when we're pleasantly absorbed in a complex activity (what psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow"), the more tedious experiences can also bring satisfaction, sort of like a good work-out.

Critical thinking can also be emotionally challenging, researchers have found. Facing a new realm of uncertainty and contradiction without relying on familiar assumptions is inherently anxiety-provoking because when you're doing it, you are, by definition, incompetent. Recent research has highlighted that both children and

adults need to be able to regulate their own emotions in order to cope with the challenges of building competence in a new area. The kind of critical thinking your professors are looking for—that is, pursuing a comprehensive, multi-faceted exploration in order to arrive at an arguable, nuanced argument—is inevitably a struggle and it may be an emotional one. Your best bet is to find ways to make those processes as efficient, pleasant, and effective as you can.

The demands students face are not just from school. Professional working roles demand critical thinking, as 81% of major employers reported in an AAC&U-commissioned survey, and it's pretty easy to imagine how critical thinking helps one make much better decisions in all aspects of life. Embrace it. And just as athletes, artists, and writers sustain their energy and inspiration for hard work by interacting with others who share these passions, look to others in the scholarly community—your professors and fellow students—to keep yourself engaged in these ongoing intellectual challenges. While writing time is often solitary, it's meant to plug you into a vibrant academic community. What your professors want, overall, is for you to join them in asking and pursuing important questions about the natural, social, and creative worlds.

This essay originally appeared in the Open SUNY textbook *Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence*. It has been edited from its original form. Original citations from the text are available at its web site.

Backpacks v. Briefcases: Steps Toward Rhetorical Analysis

Laura Bolin Carol

Learning Objectives

- Define Rhetorical Analysis and the rhetorical triangle
- Identify how rhetoric is used in writing and media
- Implement rhetorical analysis in your own reading and writing

First Impressions

Imagine the first day of class in first year composition at your university. The moment your professor walked in the room, you likely began analyzing her and making assumptions about what kind of teacher she will be. You might have noticed what kind of bag she is carrying—a tattered leather satchel? a hot pink polka-dotted backpack? a burgundy brief case? You probably also noticed what she is wearing—trendy slacks and an untucked striped shirt? a skirted suit? jeans and a tee shirt?

It is likely that the above observations were only a few of the observations you made as your professor walked in the room. You might have also noticed her shoes, her jewelry, whether she wears a wedding ring, how her hair is styled, whether she stands tall or slumps, how quickly she walks, or maybe even if her nails are done. If you don't tend to notice any of these things about your professors, you certainly do about the people around you—your roommate, others in your residence hall, students you are assigned to work with in groups, or a prospective date. For most of us, many of the people we encounter in a given day are subject to this kind of quick analysis.

Now as you performed this kind of analysis, you likely didn't walk through each of these questions one by one, write out the answer, and add up the responses to see what kind of person you are interacting with. Instead, you quickly took in the information and made an

informed, and likely somewhat accurate, decision about that person. Over the years, as you have interacted with others, you have built a mental database that you can draw on to make conclusions about what a person's looks tell you about their personality. You have become able to analyze quickly what people are saying about themselves through the way they choose to dress, accessorize, or wear their hair.

We have, of course, heard that you “can’t judge a book by its cover,” but, in fact, we do it all the time. Daily we find ourselves in situations where we are forced to make snap judgments. Each day we meet different people, encounter unfamiliar situations, and see media that asks us to do, think, buy, and act in all sorts of ways. In fact, our saturation in media and its images is one of the reasons why learning to do rhetorical analysis is so important. The more we know about how to analyze situations and draw informed conclusions, the better we can become about making savvy judgments about the people, situations and media we encounter.

Implications of Rhetorical Analysis

Media is one of the most important places where this kind of analysis needs to happen. Rhetoric—the way we use language and images to persuade—is what makes media work. Think of all the media you see and hear every day: Twitter, television shows, web pages, billboards, text messages, podcasts. Even as you read this chapter, more ways to get those messages to you quickly and in a persuasive manner are being developed. Media is constantly asking you to buy something, act in some way, believe something to be true, or interact with others in a specific manner. Understanding rhetorical messages is essential to help us to become informed consumers, but it also helps evaluate the ethics of messages, how they affect us personally, and how they affect society.

Take, for example, a commercial for men’s deodorant that tells you that you’ll be irresistible to women if you use their product. This campaign doesn’t just ask you to buy the product, though. It also asks you to trust the company’s credibility, or ethos, and to believe the messages they send about how men and women interact, about sexuality, and about what constitutes a healthy body. You have to decide whether or not you will choose to buy the product and how you will choose to respond to the messages that the commercial sends.

Or, in another situation, a Facebook group asks you to support health care reform. The rhetoric in this group uses people’s stories of their struggles to obtain affordable health care. These stories, which are often heart-wrenching, use emotion to persuade you—also called

pathos. You are asked to believe that health care reform is necessary and urgent, and you are asked to act on these beliefs by calling your congresspersons and asking them to support the reforms as well.

Because media rhetoric surrounds us, it is important to understand how rhetoric works. If we refuse to stop and think about how and why it persuades us, we can become mindless consumers who buy into arguments about what makes us value ourselves and what makes us happy. For example, research has shown that only 2% of women consider themselves beautiful (“Campaign”), which has been linked to the way that the fashion industry defines beauty. We are also told by the media that buying more stuff can make us happy, but historical surveys show that US happiness peaked in the 1950s, when people saw as many advertisements in their lifetime as the average American sees in one year (Leonard).

Our worlds are full of these kinds of social influences. As we interact with other people and with media, we are continually creating and interpreting rhetoric. In the same way that you decide how to process, analyze or ignore these messages, you create them. You probably think about what your clothing will communicate as you go to a job interview or get ready for a date. You are also using rhetoric when you try to persuade your parents to send you money or your friends to see the movie that interests you. When you post to your blog or tweet you are using rhetoric. In fact, according to rhetorician Kenneth Burke, rhetoric is everywhere: “wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is ‘meaning,’ there is ‘persuasion.’ Food eaten and digested is not rhetoric. But in the meaning of food there is much rhetoric, the meaning being persuasive enough for the idea of food to be used, like the ideas of religion, as a rhetorical device of statesmen” (71–72). In other words, most of our actions are persuasive in nature. What we choose to wear (tennis shoes vs. flip flops), where we shop (Whole Foods Market vs. Wal-Mart), what we eat (organic vs. fast food), or even the way we send information (snail mail vs. text message) can work to persuade others.

Chances are you have grown up learning to interpret and analyze these types of rhetoric. They become so commonplace that we don’t realize how often and how quickly we are able to perform this kind of rhetorical analysis. When your teacher walked in on the first day of class, you probably didn’t think to yourself, “I think I’ll do some rhetorical analysis on her clothing and draw some conclusions about what kind of personality she might have and whether I think I’ll

like her.” And, yet, you probably were able to come up with some conclusions based on the evidence you had.

However, when this same teacher hands you an advertisement, photograph or article and asks you to write a rhetorical analysis of it, you might have been baffled or felt a little overwhelmed. The good news is that many of the analytical processes that you already use to interpret the rhetoric around you are the same ones that you’ll use for these assignments.

The Rhetorical Situation, Or Discerning Context

One of the first places to start is context. Rhetorical messages always occur in a specific situation or context. The president’s speech might respond to a specific global event, like an economic summit; that’s part of the context. You choose your clothing depending on where you are going or what you are doing; that’s context. A television commercial comes on during specific programs and at specific points of the day; that’s context. A billboard is placed in a specific part of the community; that’s context, too.

In an article called “The Rhetorical Situation,” Lloyd Bitzer argues that there are three parts to understanding the context of a rhetorical moment: exigence, audience and constraints. Exigence is the circumstance or condition that invites a response; “imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (Bitzer 304). In other words, rhetorical discourse is usually responding to some kind of problem. You can begin to understand a piece’s exigence by asking, “What is this rhetoric responding to?” “What might have happened to make the rhetor (the person who creates the rhetoric) respond in this way?”

The exigence can be extremely complex, like the need for a new Supreme Court justice, or it can be much simpler, like receiving an email that asks you where you and your friends should go for your road trip this weekend. Understanding the exigence is important because it helps you begin to discover the purpose of the rhetoric. It helps you understand what the discourse is trying to accomplish.

Another part of the rhetorical context is audience, those who are the (intended or unintended) recipients of the rhetorical message. The audience should be able to respond to the exigence. In other words, the audience should be able to help address the problem. You might be very frustrated with your campus’s requirement that all first-year students purchase a meal plan for on-campus dining. You might even

send an email to a good friend back home voicing that frustration. However, if you want to address the exigence of the meal plans, the most appropriate audience would be the person/office on campus that oversees meal plans. Your friend back home cannot solve the problem (though she may be able to offer sympathy or give you some good suggestions), but the person who can change the meal plan requirements is probably on campus. Rhetors make all sorts of choices based on their audience. Audience can determine the type of language used, the formality of the discourse, the medium or delivery of the rhetoric, and even the types of reasons used to make the rhetor's argument. Understanding the audience helps you begin to see and understand the rhetorical moves that the rhetor makes.

The last piece of the rhetorical situation is the constraints. The constraints of the rhetorical situation are those things that have the power to "constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (Bitzer 306). Constraints have a lot to do with how the rhetoric is presented. Constraints can be "beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives" (Bitzer 306). Constraints limit the way the discourse is delivered or communicated. Constraints may be something as simple as your instructor limiting your proposal to one thousand words, or they may be far more complex like the kinds of language you need to use to persuade a certain community.

So how do you apply this to a piece of rhetoric? Let's say you are flipping through a magazine, and you come across an advertisement that has a large headline that reads "Why Some People Say 'D'OH' When You Say 'Homer'" ("Why"). This ad is an Ad Council public service announcement (PSA) to promote arts education and is sponsored by Americans for the Arts and NAMM, the trade association of the international music products industry.

Since you want to understand more about what this ad means and what it wants you to believe or do, you begin to think about the rhetorical situation. You first might ask, "what is the ad responding to? What problem does it hope to address?" That's the exigence. In this case, the exigence is the cutting of arts funding and children's lack of exposure to the arts. According to the Ad Council's website, "the average kid is provided insufficient time to learn and experience the arts. This PSA campaign was created to increase involvement in championing arts education both in and out of school" ("Arts"). The PSA is responding directly to the fact that kids are not getting enough arts education.

Then you might begin to think about to whom the Ad Council

targeted the ad. Unless you're a parent, you are probably not the primary audience. If you continued reading the text of the ad, you'd notice that there is information to persuade parents that the arts are helpful to their children and to let them know how to help their children become more involved with the arts. The ad tells parents that "the experience will for sure do more than entertain them. It'll build their capacity to learn more. In fact, the more art kids get, the smarter they become in subjects like math and science. And that's reason enough to make a parent say, 'D'oh!,' For Ten Simple Ways to instill art in your kids' lives visit AmericansForTheArts.org" ("Why"). Throughout the text of the ad, parents are told both what to believe about arts education and how to act in response to the belief.

There also might be a secondary audience for this ad—people who are not the main audience of the ad but might also be able to respond to the exigence. For example, philanthropists who could raise money for arts education or legislators who might pass laws for arts funding or to require arts education in public schools could also be intended audiences for this ad.

Finally, you might want to think about the constraints or the limitations on the ad. Sometimes these are harder to get at, but we can guess a few things. One constraint might be the cost of the ad. Different magazines charge differently for ad space as well as placement within the magazine, so the Ad Council could have been constrained by how much money they wanted to spend to circulate the ad. The ad is also only one page long, so there might have been a limitation on the amount of space for the ad. Finally, on the Ad Council's webpage, they list the requirements for organizations seeking the funding and support of the Ad Council. There are twelve criteria, but here are a few:

1. The sponsor organization must be a private non-profit 501(c)3 organization, private foundation, government agency or coalition of such groups.
2. The issue must address the Ad Council's focus on Health & Safety, Education, or Community. Applications which benefit children are viewed with favor—as part of the Ad Council's Commitment to Children.
3. The issue must offer a solution through an individual action.
4. The effort must be national in scope, so that the message has relevance to media audiences in communities throughout the nation. ("Become")

Each of these criteria helps to understand the limitations on both who can participate as rhetor and what can be said.

The exigence, audience and constraints are only one way to understand the context of a piece of rhetoric, and, of course, there are other ways to get at context. Some rhetoricians look at subject, purpose, audience and occasion. Others might look at the “rhetorical triangle” of writer, reader, and purpose.

An analysis using the rhetorical triangle would ask similar questions about audience as one using the rhetorical situation, but it would also ask questions about the writer and the purpose of the document. Asking questions about the writer helps the reader determine whether she or he is credible and knowledgeable. For example, the Ad Council has been creating public service announcements since 1942 (“Loose Lips Sink Ships,” anyone?) and is a non-profit agency. They also document their credibility by showing the impact of their campaigns in several ways: “Destruction of our forests by wildfires has been reduced from 22 million acres to less than 8.4 million acres per year, since our Forest Fire Prevention campaign began” and “6,000 Children were paired with a mentor in just the first 18 months of our mentoring campaign” (“About”). Based on this information, we can assume that the Ad Council is a credible rhetor, and whether or not we agree with the rhetoric they produce, we can probably assume it contains reliable information. Asking questions about the next part of the rhetorical triangle, the purpose of a piece of rhetoric, helps you understand what the rhetor is trying to achieve through the discourse. We can discern the purpose by asking questions like “what does the rhetor want me to believe after seeing this message?” or “what does the rhetor want me to do?” In some ways, the purpose takes the exigence to the next step. If the exigence frames the problem, the purpose frames the response to that problem.

The rhetorical situation and rhetorical triangle are two ways to begin to understand how the rhetoric functions within the context you find it. The key idea is to understand that no rhetorical performance takes place in a vacuum. One of the first steps to understanding a piece of rhetoric is to look at the context in which it takes place. Whatever terminology you (or your instructor) choose, it is a good idea to start by locating your analysis within a rhetorical situation.

The Heart of the Matter—The Argument

The rhetorical situation is just the beginning of your analysis, though. What you really want to understand is the argument—what the rhetor

wants you to believe or do and how he or she goes about that persuasion. Effective argumentation has been talked about for centuries. In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle was teaching the men of Athens how to persuade different kinds of audiences in different kinds of rhetorical situations. Aristotle articulated three “artistic appeals” that a rhetor could draw on to make a case—logos, pathos, and ethos.

Logos is commonly defined as argument from reason, and it usually appeals to an audience’s intellectual side. As audiences we want to know the “facts of the matter,” and logos helps present these—statistics, data, and logical statements. For example, on our Homer ad for the arts, the text tells parents that the arts will “build their capacity to learn more. In fact, the more art kids get, the smarter they become in subjects like math and science” (“Why”). You might notice that there aren’t numbers or charts here, but giving this information appeals to the audience’s intellectual side.

That audience can see a continuation of the argument on the Ad Council’s webpage, and again much of the argument appeals to logos and draws on extensive research that shows that the arts do these things:

- Allow kids to express themselves creatively and bolster their self-confidence.
- Teach kids to be more tolerant and open.
- Improve kids’ overall academic performance.
- Show that kids actively engaged in arts education are likely to have higher SAT scores than those with little to no arts involvement.
- Develop skills needed by the 21st century workforce: critical thinking, creative problem solving, effective communication, teamwork and more.
- Keep students engaged in school and less likely to drop out. (“Arts”)

Each bullet above is meant to intellectually persuade parents that they need to be more intentional in providing arts education for their children.

Few of us are persuaded only with our mind, though. Even if we intellectually agree with something, it is difficult to get us to act unless we are also persuaded in our heart. This kind of appeal to emotion is called pathos. Pathetic appeals (as rhetoric that draws on pathos is called) used alone without logos and ethos can come across as

emotionally manipulative or overly sentimental, but are very powerful when used in conjunction with the other two appeals.

Emotional appeals can come in many forms—an anecdote or narrative, an image such as a photograph, or even humor. For example, on their web campaign, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) uses an image of a baby chick and of Ronald McDonald wielding a knife to draw attention to their Chicken McCruely UnHappy Meal. These images are meant to evoke an emotional response in the viewer and, along with a logos appeal with the statistics about how cruelly chickens are treated, persuade the viewer to boycott McDonalds.

Pathos can also be a very effective appeal if the rhetor has to persuade the audience in a very short amount of time, which is why it is used heavily in print advertisements, billboards, or television commercials. An investment company will fill a 30-second commercial with images of families and couples enjoying each other, seeming happy, and surrounded by wealth to persuade you to do business with them.

The 30-second time spot does not allow them to give the 15-year growth of each of their funds, and pathetic appeals will often hold our interest much longer than intellectual appeals.

The ad promoting the importance of art uses humor to appeal to the audience's emotional side. By comparing the epic poet Homer to Homer Simpson and his classic "d'oh!" the ad uses humor to draw people into their argument about the arts. The humor continues as they ask parents if their kids know the difference between the Homers, "The only Homer some kids know is the one who can't write his own last name" ("Why"). The ad also appeals to emotion through its language use (diction), describing Homer as "one very ancient dude," and describing *The Odyssey* as "the sequel" to *The Iliad*. In this case, the humor of the ad, which occurs in the first few lines, is meant to draw the reader in and help them become interested in the argument before the ad gets to the logos, which is in the last few lines of the ad.

The humor also makes the organization seem real and approachable, contributing to the ethos. The humor might lead you to think that Americans for the Arts is not a stuffy bunch of suits, but an organization you can relate to or one that has a realistic understanding of the world. Ethos refers to the credibility of the rhetor—which can be a person or an organization. A rhetor can develop credibility in many ways. The tone of the writing and whether that tone is appropriate

for the context helps build a writer's ethos, as does the accuracy of the information or the visual presentation of the rhetoric.

In the Homer ad, the ethos is built in several ways. The simple, humorous and engaging language, such as "Greek Gods. Achilles Heel. Trojan Horse. All of these icons are brought to us by one very ancient dude—Homer. In *The Iliad* and its sequel, *The Odyssey*, he presented Greek mythology in everyday language" ("Why") draws the audience in and helps the tone of the ad seem very approachable. Also, the knowledge of Greek mythology and the information about how the arts help children—which also contribute to the logos appeal—make the ad seem credible and authoritative. However, the fact that the ad does not use too many statistics or overly technical language also contributes to the ethos of the ad because often sounding too intellectual can come across as pompous or stuffy.

Aristotle's artistic appeals are not the only way to understand the argument of rhetoric. You might choose to look at the claim or the unstated assumptions of a piece; someone else might consider the visual appeal of the rhetoric, like the font, page layout, types of paper, or images; another person might focus on the language use and the specific word choice and sentence structure of a piece. Logos, pathos, and ethos can provide a nice framework for analysis, but there are numerous ways to understand how a piece of rhetoric persuades (or fails to persuade).

Looking at the context and components of a piece of rhetoric often isn't enough, though, because it is important to draw conclusions about the rhetoric—does it successfully respond to the exigence? Is it an ethical approach? Is it persuasive? These kinds of questions let you begin to create your own claims, your own rhetoric, as you take a stand on what other people say, do, or write.

Beginning to Analyze

Once you have established the context for the rhetoric you are analyzing, you can begin to think about how well it fits into that context. You've probably been in a situation where you arrived way underdressed for an occasion. You thought that the dinner was just a casual get together with friends; it turned out to be a far more formal affair, and you felt very out of place. There are also times when discourse fails to respond to the situation well—it doesn't fit. On the other hand, successful discourses often respond very well to the context. They address the problem, consider the audience's needs, provide accurate information, and have a compelling claim. One of the

reasons you work to determine the rhetorical situation for a piece of discourse is to consider whether it works within that context. You can begin this process by asking questions like:

- Does the rhetoric address the problem it claims to address?
- Is the rhetoric targeted at an audience who has the power to make change?
- Are the appeals appropriate to the audience?
- Does the rhetor give enough information to make an informed decision?
- Does the rhetoric attempt to manipulate in any way (by giving incomplete/inaccurate information or abusing the audience's emotions)?
- What other sub-claims do you have to accept to understand the rhetor's main claim? (For example, in order to accept the Ad Council's claim that the arts boost math and science scores, you first have to value the boosting of those scores.)
- What possible negative effects might come from this rhetoric?

Rhetorical analysis asks how discourse functions in the setting in which it is found. In the same way that a commercial for denture cream seems very out of place when aired during a reality television show aimed at teenagers, rhetoric that does not respond well to its context often fails to persuade. In order to perform analysis, you must understand the context and then you must carefully study the ways that the discourse does and does not respond appropriately to that context.

The bottom line is that the same basic principles apply when you look at any piece of rhetoric (your instructor's clothing, an advertisement, the president's speech): you need to consider the context and the argument. As you begin to analyze rhetoric, there are lots of different types of rhetoric you might encounter in a college classroom, such as a:

- Political cartoon
- Wikipedia entry
- Scholarly article
- Bar Graph
- Op-Ed piece in the newspaper
- Speech
- YouTube video
- Book chapter
- Photograph
- PowerPoint Presentation

All of the above types of discourse try to persuade you. They may ask you to accept a certain kind of knowledge as valid, they may ask you to believe a certain way, or they may ask you to act. It is important to understand what a piece of rhetoric is asking of you, how it tries to persuade you, and whether that persuasion fits within the context you encounter it in. Rhetorical analysis helps you answer those questions.

Implications of Rhetorical Analysis, Or Why Do This Stuff Anyway?

So you might be wondering if you know how to do this analysis already—you can tell what kind of person someone is by their clothing, or what a commercial wants you to buy without carefully listening to it—why do you need to know how to do more formal analysis? How does this matter outside a college classroom?

Well, first of all, much of the reading and learning in college requires some level of rhetorical analysis: as you read a textbook chapter to prepare for a quiz, it is helpful to be able to distill the main points quickly; when you read a journal article for a research paper, it is necessary to understand the scholar's thesis; when you watch a video in class, it is useful to be able to understand how the creator is trying to persuade you. But college is not the only place where an understanding of how rhetoric works is important. You will find yourself in many situations—from boardrooms to your children's classrooms or churches to city council meetings where you need to understand the heart of the arguments being presented.

One final example: in November 2000, Campbell's Soup Company launched a campaign to show that many of their soups were low in calories and showed pre-pubescent girls refusing to eat because they were "watching their weight." A very small organization called Dads and Daughters, a group that fights advertising that targets girls with negative body images, contacted Campbell's explaining the problems they saw in an ad that encouraged young girls to be self-conscious about their weight, and asked Campbell's to pull the ad. A few days later, Campbell's Vice President for Marketing and Corporate Communications called. One of the dads says, "the Vice President acknowledged he had received their letter, reviewed the ad again, saw their point, and was pulling the ad," responding to a "couple of guys writing a letter" ("Media"). Individuals who understand rhetorical analysis and act to make change can have a tremendous influence on their world.

Exercises

Discussion

1. What are examples of rhetoric that you see or hear on a daily basis?
2. What are some ways that you create rhetoric? What kinds of messages are you trying to communicate?

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Murder! Rhetorically Speaking

Janet Boyd

Learning Objectives

- Find the rhetorical situation by/after reading a piece
- Identify and use tone, voice, and style in your own work
- Recognize the consequence of tone, voice, and style in the works of others

The college where I first started teaching writing called its freshman composition course “Logic and Rhetoric” after two of the three arts of discourse in the classical tradition (the third being grammar).^{*} While the students could easily explain what logic is, they struggled with the definition of rhetoric; most of their responses were more or less a politer version of this succinct definition offered by one brave student: “bullshit.” While I was surprised that he dared say such a word in class, and I am equally surprised that our publishers have so kindly agreed to print it, this offensive word so directly and memorably brings us to the crux of the matter: that choosing how to express your meaning is every bit as important as the message itself, which is really what rhetoric is. Every time you go to write anything (and every time you open your mouth), whether actively conscious of the purpose or not, you are making decisions about which words to use and what tone to establish as you order your thoughts based upon what is appropriate for your intended audience in that context.

Determined as I was to enlighten the class about the more positive and powerful aspects of rhetoric, we used no textbook in the program that could edify us. This turned out to be a good thing, for, out of necessity, I invented a simple, little exercise for them that you will participate in here, now, and dazzle yourself with the rhetorical skills you already possess, skills that are crucial for your development as an academic writer. For purposes of comparison, I have also included responses from other student writers for you to consider—all of whom

surprised themselves with their own rhetorical range and ability. First, I will give you five simple facts, nothing but the facts, as I did my students:

Who: Mark Smith What: Murdered Where: Parking garage When: June 6, 2010; 10:37 p.m. How: Multiple stab wounds

You might read such straightforward facts in a short newspaper article or hear them in a brief news report on the radio; if the person was not famous, the narrative might sound like this: Mark Smith was found stabbed to death at 10:37 p.m. on June 6th, in the local parking garage. Next, imagine that you are the detective called out to investigate the crime scene, which will, of course, demand that you also write and file a report of your findings. (In fact, many people who go into law enforcement are shocked to discover how much writing such a job regularly entails.)

Take a moment to visualize the five facts, and then pick up a pen or turn to your keyboard and write for five or so minutes as if you were that detective. In writing up the case (whoops, I have given you a clue), you may add or invent as many details as you see fit, but you may not alter the given facts. Go ahead. Get started on writing your report of the murder scene. Then come back and read the next section.

Getting in Touch with Your Inner Detective

Welcome back. While it is usually the detective who asks all the questions, we will proceed first with me grilling you not about the murder but about your report:

- How does it begin? Where does it end?
- What types of details did you find yourself adding? Why? What details did you omit? Why?
- What kind of words did you choose?
- What tone did you take? (I will admit, tone can be a tricky thing to describe; it is best done by searching for a specific adjective that describes a feeling or an attitude such as “pretentious,” “somber,” “buoyant,” “melancholic,” “didactic,” “humorous,” etc.).
- How did you order your information?

- And, since I am working under the assumption that no undergraduates have yet had careers in law enforcement, how did you know how to write like a detective would in the first place?

The answer I get to my last question invariably is “from television, of course,” nowadays particularly from shows such as the fictitious *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and reality-based *The First 48*. From such shows, and from detective movies or fiction, we get a glimpse not only into the work detectives are likely to do but also the language they choose. Gradually, and ever so subtly, we internalize this detectivespeak, which is more than just the jargon they use. **Jargon** is the terminology used by those in a particular profession or group to facilitate clear and precise communication, but this rhetorical tool is not limited just to the professional world. For example, anyone who participates in a sport uses the lingo specific to that sport, which is learned by doing. Doctors use medical jargon and lawyers use legal jargon, and they go to school specifically to learn the terms and abbreviations of their professions; so do detectives.

If you use any kind of **slang** words, you, too, use jargon, but if you studied these words in a book, they are probably not very hip or at least not very *au courant*. For slang is different in that it maintains a currency in a dual sense: it strives to be current, and it circulates among a select network of users. Jargon does not fall victim to fashion so easily as slang does, but it does have a similar effect in that they both exclude those outside of the community who do not understand the meanings of the words. And so purposefully in the case of slang and not necessarily purposefully in the case of jargon, the initiated constitute an “insiders club” for whom they themselves are their intended and best audience. When *you* write an academic paper, you are practicing how to use the jargon you have internalized through studying that discipline as you write for professors and students within that field.

Getting back to the detective writing . . . although you probably didn’t think much about whom your audience would be, who would read such a report, when you got started you probably had no problem deciding how to begin your narrative: Am I right that it starts with you arriving at the crime scene, and that you wrote in first person? Every piece of writing needs a starting point and a perspective, it is true, and the demands of the genre—in this instance the reports of detectives—shaped the very first words of your response. This is why I say with confidence that you worked your magic with more than just

detective jargon. As much as I am aware of my audience here—so much so that I am trying to engage in dialog with you through my casual tone, my informal language, and my addressing you directly by asking you questions and anticipating your responses—ultimately the format dictates that our “conversation” remain one-sided.

As much as I wish I could chat with you about the report you wrote, I cannot. Instead, I offer you here the “detective reports” of students much like you, students taking freshman composition classes who were given just the five facts about the murder, to present some rhetoric in action.

“I arrived at the crime scene at roughly 22:45 (10:45) p.m.,” writes Jeannette Olsavsky; “headquarters had received a phone call at 10:37 p.m. about a dead body lying stabbed in the parking garage on Franklin Ave.” Ilya Imyanitov starts his report with: “My partner and I received a phone call at 11:02 p.m. from dispatch that a body was found in the parking garage on 34th and 5th. We were the first to arrive on the scene.” Here’s one more example: “On Saturday, June 6th, at 10:37 p.m., the Montclair Police Department received an anonymous call regarding a body found in the Hawk Parking Garage. Detectives Dan Barry, Randy Johnson, and I, Tamara Morales, were called to the scene. Upon arrival, we noted the cadaver was facing down and had multiple stab wounds.”

Did you notice all of the things that these reports do similarly? Mere coincidence? I think not. They obey the conventions of the genre (which is a word we will gradually define). All of these opening sentences note some kind of phone call that gets them to the scene of the crime, all of them establish more specifically the location, all of them note precise times (which could be of significance), all of them are in first person, and two of our detectives work with partners. While the similarities continue to multiply as the three reports unfold, we can discern from these few sentences alone that writers attend to how they order their information and that writers can aspire towards objectivity even when writing in the first person.

Since detectives are trained observers who search for clues to aid in the investigation of a crime, they provide written, first-hand accounts of the tangible evidence they find. They also speculate as to what might have motivated the criminal to perpetrate the crime. In short, detectives have an agenda: in their reports, our three student-detectives try to identify the victim, establish injuries and cause of death, and look for signs of foul play. They also hope to interview witnesses to corroborate their findings, and one lucky detective does. Detective Imyanitov “took

down a statement from the [garage] attendant, Michael Portnick.” Portnick “states that he was making his rounds as usual,” and “he remembers checking his phone” when “he discovered a body that appeared to be stabbed to death.” Why such hesitation, Detective Imyanitov? You can tell from the verbs he uses (such as Portnick “states” and “remembers,” and the body “appeared”) that he is recording a version of the events he has not yet verified, and so he infuses his narrative with words that establish room for doubt. Through his diction, or choice of words, Imyanitov establishes a *tone* for his report that is formal, objective, inquisitive, and tentative all at the same time. Not surprisingly, Olsavsky’s and Morales’s reports adopt much the same tone, and all three also end the same way: with the call for a “full investigation” to ensue based on the preliminary findings.

These three detective reports, in fact all the detective reports I’ve ever collected from students, discuss to some degree the nature of the fatal wounds Mark Smith received. Now shift gears slightly to imagine that you are the coroner who is on duty in the city morgue when Mark’s body arrives. The coroner must do a full examination of the corpse and, what else, write up a report (trust me, there are few jobs out there that do not require writing). Visualize yourself in your new occupation, recall the “five facts,” and then take five minutes to write up your findings as a coroner might (remember, you may add or invent as many details as you like, but you may not alter the given facts). Really—go, write, and come back.

Cultivating Your Inner Coroner

Your first thoughts probably weren’t so much about audience this time, either; you were probably thinking hard about jargon, though. You know (from CSI or elsewhere) that coroners use very specific terminology that allows for precise and concise description, so to write a plausible report you had to muster up as many factual and pseudo-medical words as possible. In other words, your freedom to select words—to choose your diction—was limited greatly by the jargon of this profession, which means that the tone was also mostly dictated. Because a detective and a coroner have similar agendas in that they report causes, effects, and facts, and because they often present to similar audiences, their reports often assume a similar tone that is informative, authoritative, and forensic. But the tone of the coroner’s report is ultimately much more technical and is prescribed by the medical community. Every discipline has its own range of acceptable jargon, diction, and tone to be learned and applied.

So how does your report read? If it is like that of my students, you began it much like you did your detective report with the five, simple facts relating to the crime. After that, however, it diverges. It becomes focused on the body alone and for good reason—that's all you've got to look at! Here I'd like to answer some relevant questions I asked but never addressed with regard to your detective report: what details did you include or omit and why? Of course the coroner cannot and does not include details about the parking garage, but what would stop him/her from recording whether Mark Smith was handsome or not, or whether the tattoo on Smith's calf was cool or comical, or whether he reminded the coroner of his/her brother-in-law? You think this a dumb question, I know, because such subjectivity and personal observations do not belong in an official, objective report. Perhaps the question is dumb, but thinking about why it is dumb is not: even though you are not a real coroner (you just play one here) you have an awareness not only of what the genre demands but also what it rejects. You have a sense of what is appropriate in this context, and in many, many other rhetorical contexts, including when you assume the role of a student writing an essay (we are getting closer to a definition of genre).

What surprises me most about all the times I've asked students to write like coroners do is not that they can, even though this is the most difficult exercise in the group, but that they do not include the simplest information—a basic, physical description of Mark Smith. They tend to jump right into gory descriptions of what got him to the morgue but not anything like "The subject is a Caucasian male, is in his early thirties, about five feet, ten inches tall and 175 pounds; he has brown eyes and shoulder-length, dark brown hair. He has a birthmark on his left forearm and a two-inch scar in the vicinity of where his appendix would be." Maybe students are just too eager to cover the "five facts" I have presented them; or maybe it is that they are not so eager to ponder Mark Smith as a real but dead person with personal features; or both.

After reporting the five facts in the first sentence of his coroner's report, and adding that Mark Smith was found by an off-duty police officer, Brett Magura writes:

After post-mortem evaluation, it can be seen that only one of the six stab wounds was fatal. This stab came from behind, through the back and in between the ribs, puncturing the heart and causing internal bleeding. The fatal blow appeared to follow an effort to run away after

the first five wounds occurred to the hands and arms. The wounds on the hands and arms are determined to be defensive wounds.

Magura concludes his report with the contents of Smith's stomach and a blood-alcohol level assessment. Like many students, Magura identifies the locations of the wounds and the exact cause of death, and like many students he admirably gropes for the words that coroners use. Instead of "back" or "behind," he might have substituted "posterior" and thrown in some words like "anterior" or "lateral" or "laceration," I would venture, but his report is on target even if his and my jargon would benefit from some medical schooling.

Lecille Desampardo is the only student I've known to give the report a case number, "Murder Case #123," which immediately suggests that her report is official and conforms to standards we would also find in Cases 1 through 122. Even better, one could easily keep track of and even reference such a report, which would be important if it should be needed as forensic evidence. Desampardo finds "remnants of some kind of black grease" in the stab wounds, and upon the miracles of further lab testing links it to the "Nissan Pathfinder owned by the victim." Coupled with the "irregular shape" of the stab wounds, the murder weapon was a "monkey wrench" she concludes. What kind of weapon did you deduce killed Mark Smith? Was it a hunting knife or a butcher's knife or scissors or something else? Does your report work to support that assumption? Chances are you found yourself knowing exactly what content to include but were frustrated at not having the 94 Janet Boyd exact words you desired at your disposal. In this rhetorical instance, you even know what it is you don't know (which, unfortunately, can also be the case when you are first learning academic writing).

On the other hand, perhaps these words came easy for Kristin Flynn who writes,

Mark Smith was an amazing father, husband and good friend. His unfortunate murder and untimely demise come as a shock to all who knew him. Mark and I go way back [. . .]. His memory will be forever treasured, and it is truly a shame to have to say goodbye to him today.

Wait a minute? What happened to the knife, the parking garage, and

the stab wounds? One would hope that such graphic details wouldn't make their way into a eulogy.

Yes, the next exercise I want you to write is a short eulogy for Mark Smith, which is a speech of remembrance delivered at a funeral. This exercise is perhaps one of the easier ones to write, but that is only if you liked Mark Smith and can write in honesty; imagine how difficult it would be if you didn't like him? So return now to the "five facts," invent the details that you need, and work for five minutes or so to fulfill the rhetorical demands of the genre of the eulogy (which I hope you'll never get much practice in).

Learning How to Say Goodbye

Many students get flustered with this exercise because they feel compelled to include all "five facts" while they intuitively know that an actual eulogy would not; the instructions I give require no such thing. I write "intuitively" here because, again, I cannot imagine that many of you are trained to write eulogies, and so you proceeded based on the knowledge you have internalized from your religion or culture. The example of the eulogy highlights very well the decisions all writers must make about what to include and what to omit based upon the expectations of the audience for whom they write (including an academic audience). You were probably rather surprised to read just on the heels of the coroners' reports an excerpt of the eulogy Flynn penned because you were expecting more blood and guts. It is a good time to admit that I did this on purpose, and that in my classes I aim for this element of surprise as well; my students don't know that they have been assigned different writing tasks relating to the facts of Mark Smith's murder, and when they read them aloud without identifying the piece the contrasts stand sharp. After only a few sentences, though, the students recognize what genre it is they hear because of the various rhetorical cues they so quickly discern.

So what did you include in your eulogy? Of the five facts, you probably mentioned Mark Smith by his whole name at first, and thereafter by his first name to foster a sense of familiarity, and then did your best to avoid the other four facts entirely, facts the detectives must write about so extensively. Flynn mentions the "unfortunate murder" in her eulogy, which could be considered daring, but she does so to commiserate with others in their sense of "shock." Notice, though, that she doesn't say that Mark Smith "died" or "croaked" or was "offed"; okay, clearly "croaked" and "offed" are too indelicate, but

why not “died,” which seems innocuous enough? She writes of Mark’s “untimely demise,” which is a euphemism.

When people replace a word that can be considered offensive, discomforting, or controversial with another term to make it seem less so, they have chosen a euphemism. Death provides an excellent example of something that makes us uncomfortable, and so we have many euphemistic synonyms for dying such as “to pass on,” “to leave this world,” “to be with God,” “to breathe one’s last,” and “to go to a better place.” Interestingly enough, we have many irreverent synonyms for dying in addition to “croak,” such as “to kick the bucket,” “to bite the big one,” “to push up the daisies,” or “to buy the farm,” which are colloquial and try to bring humor to this bothersome subject. **Colloquial** refers to language that is informal and usually spoken but not written (such as “ain’t” and “gonna”). These particular death *colloquialisms* can also be considered dysphemisms in that they exaggerate rather than soften what could be offensive. While colloquialisms and **dysphemisms** usually do not belong in academic writing, euphemism can serve its purpose depending on your tone.

But enough talk about talk. Let’s get back to the writing. Adi Baruch wrote her eulogy in the form of letter (also known as an **epistle**) to Mark Smith, which is a bit of a departure from the genre in its strictest sense, but she nevertheless avoids mentioning anything about the murder while still conveying that he has, well, left us:

Whoever knew quite how cruel life could be? Surely, neither you nor I. We’ve known each other for the past ten years, always growing closer. Unfortunately enough, for me and many others, your life has come to an end. We can no longer continue to make great memories together. . . . Your memory will live on with every life you’ve ever touched.

Does your eulogy sound like this? Is it written in first-person, is it evasive of specifics but generally positive, is the diction a bit stilted and the tone sentimental, wistful, and poignant? Does yours, like hers, eventually end with saying good-bye to the deceased (aka the dead person)?

Or does your eulogy sound more like this one from Micheal Lynch:

For those of you who knew Mark Smith as I did, I am sure you are not the least bit surprised to hear that he was

murdered and quite violently with multiple stab wounds. Mark was our friend and our benefactor, but of course we all know he was a low-life criminal. With the number of enemies Mark made, I'm sure that the only surprise is that it took them until 10:37 p.m. on Saturday, June 6th to catch up with his sorry butt. It is ironic, you must agree, that he "bought it" in a parking garage since the only thing he ever did in a parking garage is rip off the things that everybody who parked there had brought! Yes, we'll miss you Mark and those little surprises he used to bring to each of us. Rest in peace, buddy!

When we read this one aloud in class, much laughter broke out. Why is it funny? Because it runs contrary to our established expectations, and incongruity is often a source of humor. The students recognized that while Lynch conforms to the rhetorical conventions of eulogy—he writes in first-person, remembers the deceased fondly, and says goodbye—he also works against the conventions of the genre in terms of content, diction, and tone. In short, this incongruity makes the piece ironic, which Lynch might be trying to flag when he points to the situational irony of the location of the murder.

I imagine that Lynch, like many students, assumed he had to work in all "five-facts" and saw his way to a very creative solution; knowing that such facts don't belong in a eulogy and wanting to respond to the assignment as he interpreted it, Lynch turned the genre on its head. He showed savvy in writing it and his classmates in laughing at it, for they all recognized how much one can push or play with a given genre and still maintain its identifiable qualities. The content is graphic, the diction is crass, and the tone is irreverent. Nonetheless, it remains a eulogy, one that would likely get recited among friends (but not family) with shots of whiskey in hand.

Herein we might find our definition of **genre**, which by necessity remains perpetually loose: when the traits or attributes considered normal to or typical of a particular kind of creative piece, such as in literature, film, or music, make it that kind and not another. For example, we know horror films when we see them and we recognize classical music when we hear it because we can classify these things according to the conventions of their genres. And we can identify the genre of the piece I am writing for you as an expository essay with its thesis, its body paragraphs of support and detail, and, as you will see, its conclusion, even if my tone is playful.

Whether or not Mark Smith was a low-life, petty thief as Lynch makes him out to be, the person who murdered him is most definitely a criminal, which brings us to our last rhetorical scenario. Your final task is to write a closing argument as if you were the prosecutor addressing the jury who will find the accused murderer guilty or not. Go ahead. Put on a suit and become a lawyer (in this profession, if you are not off researching you are usually writing), and then come back to see how your closing argument compares with the others.

Learning to Love Your Inner Lawyer

Notice how I kindly provided a big clue to get you started, since you've had so much to think about already. When you wrote the eulogy I did not call attention to the fact that your audience was friends and family, for whom you wrote nonetheless, but here I do remind you that you were to address the jury. This is your signal not to soften the blow of the loss of Mark Smith for your audience, as you did in the eulogy, but to write it big, to write it bold . . . perhaps to the point where you could be accused of exaggeration (in writing aka hyperbole). You must play upon your audience's heartstrings here, too, of course, but you must balance it with cold, hard, irrefutable facts as per the genre's demands. How did you begin?

Despite my clue, only some of your peers start their closing arguments as Christopher Traina and Ricardo Ataíde did with the requisite and respectful "ladies and gentlemen of the jury" (Traina did admit that both of his parents are attorneys, but it is unlikely he attends any of the closing arguments they might make!). What effect does this address have? It alerts the members of the jury that what follows is directed specifically to them, reminds them of their important role, and helps to establish a rapport between them and the attorney. The closing argument is a good example of how the different rhetorical tools available carry different weight given the rhetorical situation.

Although awareness of audience is always hugely important when one goes to write anything, a direct address is not, which we see with the lack thereof in the detective's and coroner's reports. They write for an **implied audience** (as you do in your academic writing), which is more often than not comprised of attorneys and, funnily enough, eventually of judges and juries (which is why their work is ultimately forensic). Furthermore, when it comes time to communicate to the jury how Mark Smith was murdered, the attorney would do best to translate the medical jargon of the coroner's report into **layperson's**

terms, or language for people who are not experts; plain, simple diction would prevail over sophisticated jargon in this context. And while the detective's and the coroner's reports should be devoid of emotion, just as the eulogy should be saturated with it, the attorney aims to persuade the jury with both objective facts, what Aristotle calls **logos**, and simmering emotion, what he calls **pathos**; and lastly, depending on the lawyer, the jury will also likely be persuaded by his/her **ethos**, or credible character.

Appealing to his jury in first person, Traina states for "what reasons" the "accused" committed the "heinous murder . . . you and I will never know. But I do ask you to do what is right. That is when you go to deliberate, you remember the grieving family. Remember the horrendous photos. Remember the lack of emotion on the accused's face. You must remember all of these facts, find the defendant guilty, and put him in jail where he will not be a danger to society. I thank you for your time and hope for your diligence in [reaching] your verdict." Traina charges the jury with the moral duty to do what is right based on the evidence provided while he also beseeches them—in short sentences of parallel form that one can imagine him articulating very slowly and deliberately—to dwell not only on the family's agony but on the defendant's lack of remorse. This *appeal to emotion* (aka *pathos*) doesn't alter the facts per se, but it provides a less than neutral lens, a bias, through which the attorney hopes the jury will view them (although in academic writing one is often encouraged to avoid such bias). The tone Traina establishes is one full of urgency and gravity for the case and also of reverence for the jury, whom he thanks at the end and so maintains the rapport he initially established.

You might find that your closing argument reads so much like Traina's that they can be considered "generic" closing arguments. Or maybe you went the route that Ataide did, which is to highlight the significant points of the investigation as you constructed a summary—a conclusion. Ataide looked a bit at the criminal mind of the defendant who "harbored feelings of despair and hatred for quite some time" before murdering his former professor, all of which are documented "in his emails and Twitter updates." Ataide concludes his argument by directly reminding the jury that while the professor "will never again teach a class, you have the opportunity to teach the accused, Lucas Brown, a lesson here today. A conviction should be your only choice." This clever twist on teaching a lesson provides eloquent closure to his argument.

Or perhaps you, like Chelsea Vick, felt mounting drama to be

the most persuasive approach. She tells the jury that “the defendant has not only physically stabbed my client Mark Smith; he has stabbed the judicial system. Every entrance wound on my victim’s body is another blow to the system our government runs on.” She, like Traina, conjures up fear with the prospect of returning such a person to the streets, and she, too, “leaves you [the jury] to deliberate whether to send a murderer to jail or to another parking garage.”

By making reference to the “system our government runs on,” Vick plays with the sometimes subtle line between the **connotation** and **denotation** of words. What a word denotes is its literal definition or what you would find should you look it up in the dictionary, but words have connotations, too, which are the emotional associations, positive or negative, we bring to them. While an apple pie denotes a dessert made of sliced apples and sugar baked in a single or double flour crust, in the United States it can also conjure up positive emotions about home and/or patriotism about country. We imagine apple pies to be lovingly-baked by apron-clad moms who raise citizens who are, well, as the saying goes, “as American as apple pie.” Vick’s comment that the defendant has metaphorically “stabbed the judicial system” in addition to Mark Smith is meant to produce negative connotations beyond the actual murder; she conjures up the looming threat that our entire way of life would be at stake should the jury do anything other than convict the defendant.

If we envision in our minds the passionate delivery of these closing arguments, we might imagine that we have finally come close to the first definition of “rhetoric” that the *American Heritage Dictionary* online offers us, which is “the art or study of using language effectively and persuasively,” rather than that one-word definition my brave student once proffered. Yes, our attorneys all did perform admirably in their endeavors to persuade the jury with their words, but we find examples of effective rhetoric in all of the writing scenarios we have considered.

Here I offer my definition: **rhetoric** is what allows you to write (and speak) appropriately for a given situation, one that is determined by the expectations of your audience, implied or acknowledged, whether you are texting, writing a love letter, or bleeding a term paper. When you go to write, you might not always be actively aware of your audience as an audience. You may not even consciously realize that you are enacting certain rhetorical strategies while rejecting others. But each time you write you will find yourself in a rhetorical situation, in other words within a context or genre, that nudges you to choose the right diction or even jargon and to strike the right tone.

In this essay, I put you in three rhetorical situations for which you have no formal training—writing hypothetically as if you were a detective, a coroner, and a lawyer—and you knew what to do, as you did with the eulogy. This shows the extent to which we absorb and internalize our rhetorical tools by watching media, reading books, and participating in our culture. More importantly, you can now see that when I told you at the beginning that you are already in possession of the rhetorical skills necessary for mastering the genre of academic writing and that you need only apply them, I wasn't just feeding you a bunch of bull.

Exercises

Discussion

1. Which of the exercises did you find easiest to write? Why?
2. Which of the exercises did you find hardest to write? Why?
3. What does the rhetorical situation of academic writing demand? Who is the audience? What tone is appropriate? What jargon might be needed? What information might be included and/or rejected in an academic paper?

Notes

1. Oddly enough, my moment of inspiration came when I got on a bus to commute to New York City and found myself sitting next to the famous author and columnist Anna Quindlen. Thanks, Anna!
2. While coroners are forensic scientists, the terms are not exactly synonymous, for forensic actually means “legal,” and a forensic scientist can be anyone in the discipline who gathers evidence of interest in legal matters.
3. And I would add, unfortunately for Mark, too!

Work Cited

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Part 2: The Writing Process

Getting started with writing can take many forms. Some writers start with a question they want to answer; others take a prompt or an assignment and build an outline. Many of us have experience with free-writing or journal writing as a way to get words on the page.

This section addresses both the nuts-and-bolts planning aspects of getting started with writing and the higher level demands of figuring out how to structure an essay so that it meets with college writing expectations. It begins a longer discussion, as well, on how to find good information on which to base your arguments and explorations, a discussion we'll continue in the research section.

Constructing the Thesis and Argument from the Ground Up

Amy Guptill

Learning Objectives

- Construct an essay from an arguable thesis

Moving beyond the five-paragraph theme

As an instructor, I've noted that a number of new (and sometimes not-so-new) students are skilled wordsmiths and generally clear thinkers but are nevertheless stuck in a high-school style of writing. They struggle to let go of certain assumptions about how an academic paper should be. The essay portion of the SAT is a representative artifact of the writing skills that K-12 education imparts. Some students who have mastered that form, and enjoyed a lot of success from doing so, assume that college writing is simply more of the same. The skills that go into a very basic kind of essay—often called the five-paragraph theme—are indispensable. If you're good at the five-paragraph theme, then you're good at identifying a clear and consistent thesis, arranging cohesive paragraphs, organizing evidence for key points, and situating an argument within a broader context through the intro and conclusion.

In college you need to build on those essential skills. The five-paragraph theme, as such, is bland and formulaic; it doesn't compel deep thinking. Your professors are looking for a more ambitious and arguable thesis, a nuanced and compelling argument, and real-life evidence for all key points, all in an organically¹ structured paper.

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 contrast the standard five-paragraph theme and the organic college paper:

1. "Organic" here doesn't mean "pesticide-free" or containing carbon; it means the paper grows and develops, sort of like a living thing.

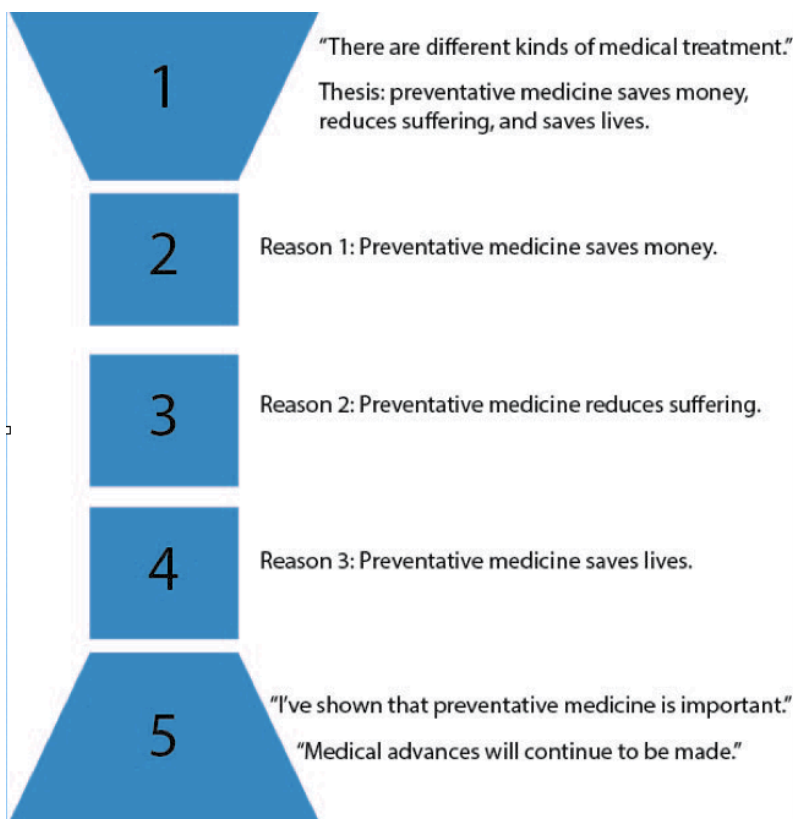


Figure 3.1

The five-paragraph theme, outlined in Figure 3.1 is probably what you're used to: the introductory paragraph starts broad and gradually narrows to a thesis, which readers expect to find at the very end of that paragraph. In this idealized format, the thesis invokes the magic number of three; three reasons why a statement is true. Each of those reasons is explained and justified in the three body paragraphs, and then the final paragraph restates the thesis before gradually getting broader. This format is easy for readers to follow, and it helps writers organize their points and the evidence that goes with them. That's why you learned this format.

Figure 3.2, in contrast, represents a paper on the same topic that has the more organic form expected in college. The first key difference is

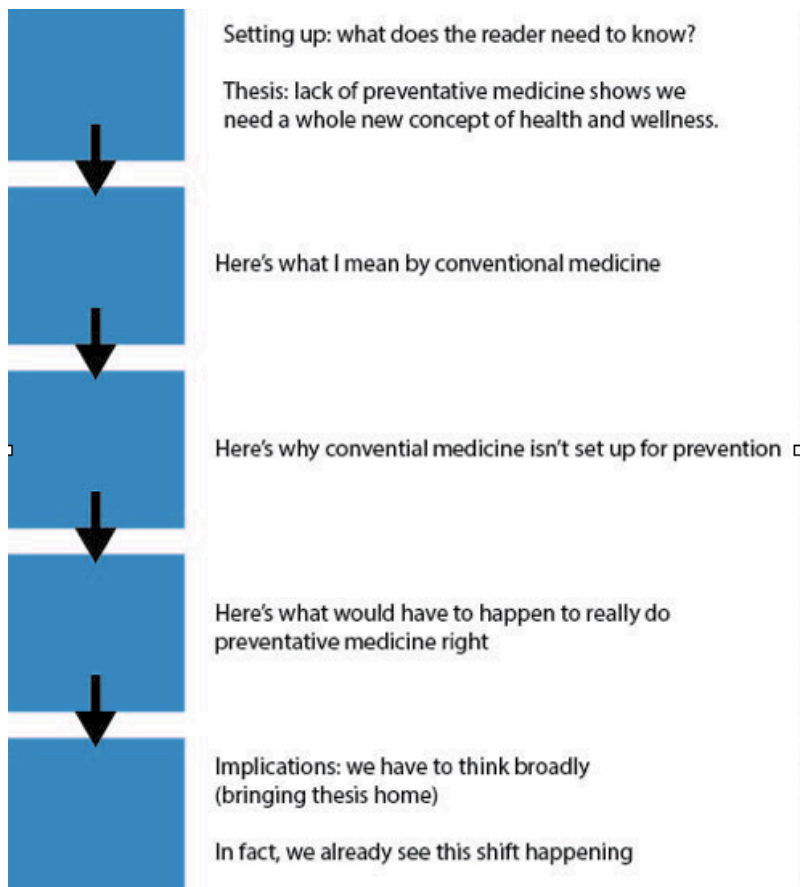


Figure 3.2: The “organic” college paper

the thesis. Rather than simply positing a number of reasons to think that something is true, it puts forward an arguable statement: one with which a reasonable person might disagree. An arguable thesis gives the paper purpose. It surprises readers and draws them in. You hope your reader thinks, “Huh. Why would they come to that conclusion?” and then feels compelled to read on. The body paragraphs, then, build on one another to carry out this ambitious argument. In the classic five-paragraph theme (Figure 3.1) it hardly matters which of the three reasons you explain first or second. In the more organic structure (Figure 3.2) each paragraph specifically leads to the next.

The last key difference is seen in the conclusion. Because the organic essay is driven by an ambitious, non-obvious argument, the reader comes to the concluding section thinking “OK, I’m convinced by the argument. What do you, author, make of it? Why does it matter?” The conclusion of an organically structured paper has a real job to do. It doesn’t just reiterate the thesis; it explains why the thesis matters.

The substantial time you spent mastering the five-paragraph form in Figure 3.1 was time well spent; it’s hard to imagine anyone succeeding with the more organic form without the organizational skills and habits of mind inherent in the simpler form. But if you assume that you must adhere rigidly to the simpler form, you’re blunting your intellectual ambition. Your professors will not be impressed by obvious theses, loosely related body paragraphs, and repetitive conclusions. They want you to undertake an ambitious independent analysis, one that will yield a thesis that is somewhat surprising and challenging to explain.

The three-story thesis: from the ground up

You have no doubt been drilled on the need for a thesis statement and its proper location at the end of the introduction. And you also know that all of the key points of the paper should clearly support the central driving thesis. Indeed, the whole model of the five-paragraph theme hinges on a clearly stated and consistent thesis. However, some students are surprised—and dismayed—when some of their early college papers are criticized for not having a good thesis. Their professor might even claim that the paper doesn’t have a thesis when, in the author’s view it clearly does. So, what makes a good thesis in college?

A good thesis is non-obvious. High school teachers needed to make sure that you and all your classmates mastered the basic form of the academic essay. Thus, they were mostly concerned that you had a clear and consistent thesis, even if it was something obvious like “sustainability is important.” A thesis statement like that has a wide-enough scope to incorporate several supporting points and concurring evidence, enabling the writer to demonstrate his or her mastery of the five-paragraph form. Good enough! When they can, high school teachers nudge students to develop arguments that are less obvious and more engaging. College instructors, though, fully expect you to produce something more developed.

A good thesis is arguable. In everyday life, “arguable” is often used as a synonym for “doubtful.” For a thesis, though, “arguable”

means that it's worth arguing: it's something with which a reasonable person might disagree. This arguability criterion dovetails with the non-obvious one: it shows that the author has deeply explored a problem and arrived at an argument that legitimately needs 3, 5, 10, or 20 pages to explain and justify. In that way, a good thesis sets an ambitious agenda for a paper. A thesis like "sustainability is important" isn't at all difficult to argue for, and the reader would have little intrinsic motivation to read the rest of the paper. However, an arguable thesis like "sustainability policies will inevitably fail if they do not incorporate social justice," brings up some healthy skepticism. Thus, the arguable thesis makes the reader want to keep reading.

A good thesis is well specified. Some student writers fear that they're giving away the game if they specify their thesis up front; they think that a purposefully vague thesis might be more intriguing to the reader. However, consider movie trailers: they always include the most exciting and poignant moments from the film to attract an audience. In academic papers, too, a well specified thesis indicates that the author has thought rigorously about an issue and done thorough research, which makes the reader want to keep reading. Don't just say that a particular policy is effective or fair; say what makes it so. If you want to argue that a particular claim is dubious or incomplete, say why in your thesis.

A good thesis includes implications. Suppose your assignment is to write a paper about some aspect of the history of linen production and trade, a topic that may seem exceedingly arcane. And suppose you have constructed a well supported and creative argument that linen was so widely traded in the ancient Mediterranean that it actually served as a kind of currency². That's a strong, insightful, arguable, well specified thesis. But which of these thesis statements do you find more engaging?

Version A:

Linen served as a form of currency in the ancient Mediterranean world, connecting rival empires through circuits of trade.

Version B:

Linen served as a form of currency in the ancient Mediterranean world, connecting rival empires through circuits of

2. For more see Fabio Lopez-Lazaro "Linen." In Encyclopedia of World Trade from Ancient Times to the Present. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005.

trade. The economic role of linen raises important questions about how shifting environmental conditions can influence economic relationships and, by extension, political conflicts.

Putting your claims in their broader context makes them more interesting to your reader and more impressive to your professors who, after all, assign topics that they think have enduring significance. Finding that significance for yourself makes the most of both your paper and your learning.

How do you produce a good, strong thesis? And how do you know when you've gotten there? Many instructors and writers find useful a metaphor based on this passage by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.³:

There are one-story intellects, two-story intellects, and three-story intellects with skylights. All fact collectors who have no aim beyond their facts are one-story men. Two-story men compare, reason, generalize using the labor of fact collectors as their own. Three-story men idealize, imagine, predict—their best illumination comes from above the skylight.

One-story theses state inarguable facts. Two-story theses bring in an arguable (interpretive or analytical) point. Three-story theses nest that point within its larger, compelling implications⁴.

The biggest benefit of the three-story metaphor is that it describes a process for building a thesis. To build the first story, you first have to get familiar with the complex, relevant facts surrounding the problem or question. You have to be able to describe the situation thoroughly and accurately. Then, with that first story built, you can layer on the second story by formulating the insightful, arguable point that animates the analysis. That's often the most effortful part: brainstorming, elaborating and comparing alternative ideas, finalizing

3. Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., *The Poet at the Breakfast Table* (New York: Houghton & Mifflin, 1892)

4. The metaphor is extraordinarily useful even though the passage is annoying. Beyond the sexist language of the time, I don't appreciate the condescension toward "fact-collectors," which reflects a general modernist tendency to elevate the abstract and denigrate the concrete. In reality, data-collection is a creative and demanding craft, arguably more important than theorizing.

your point. With that specified, you can frame up the third story by articulating why the point you make matters beyond its particular topic or case.

Student Advice

Thesis: that's the word that pops at me whenever I write an essay. Seeing this word in the prompt scared me and made me think to myself, "Oh great, what are they really looking for?" or "How am I going to make a thesis for a college paper?" When rehearsing that I would be focusing on theses again in a class, I said to myself, "Here we go again!" But after learning about the three story thesis, I never had a problem with writing another thesis. In fact, I look forward to being asked on a paper to create a thesis.

Timothée Pizarro

For example, imagine you have been assigned a paper about the impact of online learning in higher education. You would first construct an account of the origins and multiple forms of online learning and assess research findings about its use and effectiveness. If you've done that well, you'll probably come up with a well considered opinion that wouldn't be obvious to readers who haven't looked at the issue in depth. Maybe you'll want to argue that online learning is a threat to the academic community. Or perhaps you'll want to make the case that online learning opens up pathways to college degrees that traditional campus-based learning does not. In the course of developing your central, argumentative point, you'll come to recognize its larger context; in this example, you may claim that online learning can serve to better integrate higher education with the rest of society, as online learners bring their educational and career experiences together. To outline this example:

- First story: Online learning is becoming more prevalent and takes many different forms.
- Second story: While most observers see it as a transformation of higher education, online learning is better thought of an extension of higher education in that it reaches learners who aren't disposed to participate in traditional campus-based education.
- Third story: Online learning appears to be a promising way

to better integrate higher education with other institutions in society, as online learners integrate their educational experiences with the other realms of their life, promoting the freer flow of ideas between the academy and the rest of society.

Here's another example of a three-story thesis:⁵

- First story: Edith Wharton did not consider herself a modernist writer, and she didn't write like her modernist contemporaries.
- Second story: However, in her work we can see her grappling with both the questions and literary forms that fascinated modernist writers of her era. While not an avowed modernist, she did engage with modernist themes and questions.
- Third story: Thus, it is more revealing to think of modernism as a conversation rather than a category or practice.

Here's one more example:

- First story: Scientists disagree about the likely impact in the U.S. of the light brown apple moth (LBAM), an agricultural pest native to Australia.
- Second story: Research findings to date suggest that the decision to spray pheromones over the skies of several southern Californian counties to combat the LBAM was poorly thought out.
- Third story: Together, the scientific ambiguities and the controversial response strengthen the claim that industrial-style approaches to pest management are inherently unsustainable.

A thesis statement that stops at the first story isn't usually considered a thesis. A two-story thesis is usually considered competent, though some two-story theses are more intriguing and ambitious than others. A thoughtfully crafted and well informed three-story thesis puts the author on a smooth path toward an excellent paper.

5. Drawn from Jennifer Haytock, *Edith Wharton and the Conversations of Literary Modernism* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2008).

Student Advice

The concept of a three-story thesis framework was the most helpful piece of information I gained from the writing component of [this course]. The first time I utilized it in a college paper, my professor included “good thesis” and “excellent introduction” in her notes and graded it significantly higher than my previous papers. You can expect similar results if you dig deeper to form three-story theses. More importantly, doing so will make the actual writing of your paper more straightforward as well. Arguing something specific makes the structure of your paper much easier to design.

Peter Farrell

Three-story theses and the organically structured argument

The three-story thesis is a beautiful thing. For one, it gives a paper authentic momentum. The first paragraph doesn't just start with some broad, vague statement; every sentence is crucial for setting up the thesis. The body paragraphs build on one another, moving through each step of the logical chain. Each paragraph leads inevitably to the next, making the transitions from paragraph to paragraph feel wholly natural. The conclusion, instead of being a mirror-image paraphrase of the introduction, builds out the third story by explaining the broader implications of the argument. It offers new insight without departing from the flow of the analysis.

I should note here that a paper with this kind of momentum often reads like it was knocked out in one inspired sitting. But in reality, just like accomplished athletes and artists, masterful writers make the difficult thing look easy. As writer Anne Lamott notes, reading a well written piece feels like its author sat down and typed it out, “bounding along like huskies across the snow.” However, she continues,

This is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much.⁶

Experienced writers don't figure out what they want to say and then write it. They write in order to figure out what they want to say.

Experienced writers develop theses in dialog with the body of the essay. An initial characterization of the problem leads to a tentative thesis, and then drafting the body of the paper reveals thorny contradictions or critical areas of ambiguity, prompting the writer to revisit or expand the body of evidence and then refine the thesis based on that fresh look. The revised thesis may require that body paragraphs be reordered and reshaped to fit the emerging three-story thesis. Throughout the process, the thesis serves as an anchor point while the author wades through the morass of facts and ideas. The dialogue between thesis and body continues until the author is satisfied or the due date arrives, whatever comes first. It's an effortful and sometimes tedious process. Novice writers, in contrast, usually oversimplify the writing process. They formulate some first-impression thesis, produce a reasonably organized outline, and then flesh it out with text, never taking the time to reflect or truly revise their work. They assume that revision is a step backward when, in reality, it is a major step forward.

Student Reflection

Everyone has a different way that they like to write. For instance, I like to pop my earbuds in, blast dubstep music and write on a white board. I like using the white board because it is a lot easier to revise and edit while you write. After I finish writing a paragraph that I am completely satisfied with on the white board, I sit in front of it with my laptop and just type it up.

Kaethe Leonard

Another benefit of the three-story thesis framework is that it demystifies what a “strong” argument is in academic culture. In an era of political polarization, many students may think that a strong argument is based on a simple, bold, combative statement that is promoted in the most forceful way possible. “Gun control is a travesty!” “Shakespeare is the best writer who ever lived!” When

students are encouraged to consider contrasting perspectives in their papers, they fear that doing so will make their own thesis seem mushy and weak. However, in academics a “strong” argument is comprehensive and nuanced, not simple and polemical. The purpose of the argument is to explain to readers why the author—through the course of his or her in-depth study—has arrived at a somewhat surprising point. On that basis, it has to consider plausible counter-arguments and contradictory information. Academic argumentation exemplifies the popular adage about all writing: show, don’t tell. In crafting and carrying out the three-story thesis, you are showing your reader the work you have done.

The model of the organically structured paper and the three-story thesis framework explained here is the very foundation of the paper itself and the process that produces it. The subsequent chapters, focusing on sources, paragraphs, and sentence-level wordsmithing, all follow from the notion that you are writing to think and writing to learn as much as you are writing to communicate. Your professors assume that you have the self-motivation and organizational skills to pursue your analysis with both rigor and flexibility; that is, they envision you developing, testing, refining and sometimes discarding your own ideas based on a clear-eyed and open-minded assessment of the evidence before you.

Other resources

The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers an excellent, readable run-down on the five-paragraph theme, why most college writing assignments want you to go beyond it, and those times when the simpler structure is actually a better choice.

There are many useful websites that describe good thesis statements and provide examples. Those from the writing centers at Hamilton College, Purdue University, and Clarkson University are especially helpful.

Exercises

1. Find a scholarly article or book that is interesting to you. Focusing on the abstract and introduction, outline the first, second, and third stories of its thesis.

2. Here is a list of one-story theses. Come up with two-story and three-story versions of each one.

2.1 Television programming includes content that some find objectionable.

2.2 The percent of children and youth who are overweight or obese has risen in recent decades.

2.3 First-year college students must learn how to independently manage their time.

2.4 The things we surround ourselves with symbolize who we are.

3. Find an example of a five-paragraph theme (online essay mills, your own high school work), produce an alternative three-story thesis, and outline an organically structured paper to carry that thesis out.

4. Go to the SAT website about the essay exam, choose one of the highly rated sample essays. In structure, how does it compare to the five-paragraph theme? How does it compare to the organic college essay? Use the SAT essay example you found to create alternative examples for Figures 3.1 and 3.2.

This essay originally appeared in *Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence*, an Open SUNY textbook.

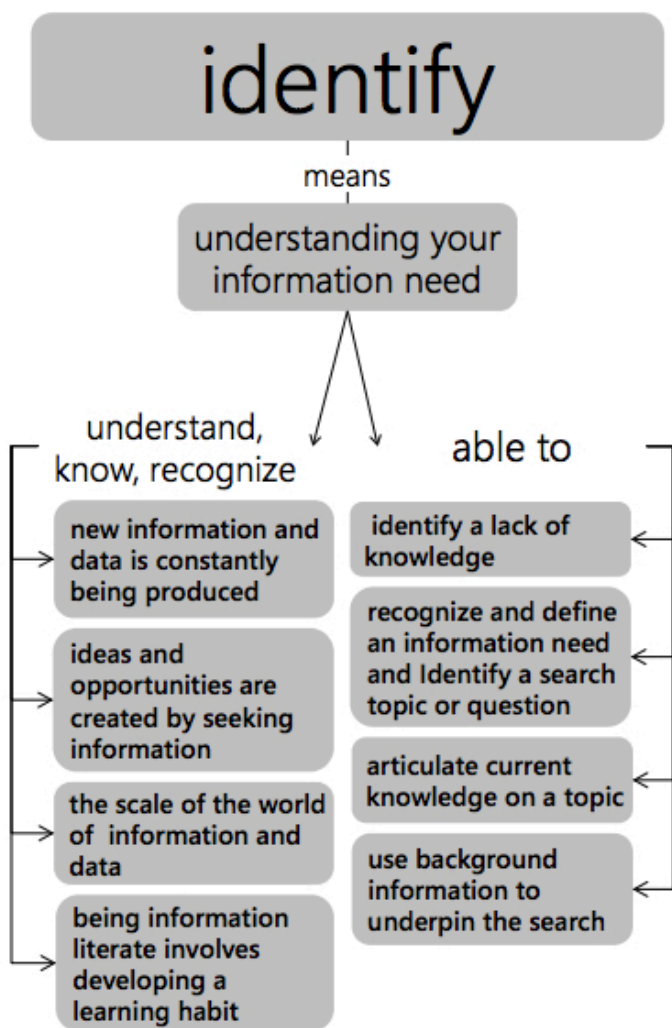
Identify

Begin Your Search

Deborah Bernnard, Greg Bobish, Jenna Hecker, Irina Holden, Allison Hosier, Trudi Jacobsen, Tor Loney, and Daryl Bullis

Learning Objectives

- Identify the needs related to a search for information and their influence upon the way the search is conducted
- Develop a research question from an identified need
- Develop a thesis statement to answer the research question



In this chapter, you will learn about the first pillar of information literacy. While the pillars are normally presented in a certain order, it is important to remember that they are not intended to be a step-by-step guide to be followed in a strict order. In most research projects, you will find that you move back and forth between the different pillars as you discover more information and come up with more questions

about your topic. In this chapter you will learn how to identify your information need so that you can begin your research, but it is likely that you will also revisit some of the ideas in this chapter to make sure you are actually meeting that need with your research findings. A person proficient in the Identify pillar is expected to be able to identify a personal need for information. They understand:

- That new information and data is constantly being produced and that there is always more to learn
- That being information literate involves developing a learning habit so new information is being actively sought all the time
- That ideas and opportunities are created by investigating/ seeking information
- The scale of the world of published and unpublished information and data They are able to
- Identify a lack of knowledge in a subject area
- Identify a search topic/question and define it using simple terminology
- Articulate current knowledge on a topic
- Recognize a need for information and data to achieve a specific end and define limits to the information need
- Use background information to underpin the search
- Take personal responsibility for an information search
- Manage time effectively to complete a search

Scenario

Norm Allknow was having trouble. He had been using computers since he was five years old and thought he knew all there was to know about them. So, when he was given an assignment to write about the impact of the Internet on society, he thought it would be a breeze. He would just write what he knew, and in no time the paper would be finished. In fact, Norm thought the paper would probably be much longer than the required ten pages. He spent a few minutes imagining how impressed his teacher was going to be, and then sat down to start writing. He wrote about how the Internet had helped him to play online games with his friends, and to keep in touch with distant relatives, and even to do some homework once in a while. Soon he leaned back in his chair and looked over what he had written. It was just half a page long and he was out of ideas.

Identifying a Personal Need for Information

One of the first things you need to do when beginning any information-based project is to identify your personal need for information. This may seem obvious, but it is something many of us take for granted. We may mistakenly assume, as Norm did in the above example, that we already know enough to proceed. Such an assumption can lead us to waste valuable time working with incomplete or outdated information. Information literacy addresses a number of abilities and concepts that can help us to determine exactly what our information needs are in various circumstances. These are discussed below, and are followed by exercises to help develop your fluency in this area.

Understanding the Context of an Information Need

When you realize that you have an information need it may be because you thought you knew more than you actually do, or it may be that there is simply new information you were not aware of. One of the most important things you can do when starting to research a topic is to scan the existing information landscape to find out what is already out there. We'll get into more specific strategies for accessing different types of information later in the book, particularly in the Gather chapter, but for now it pays to think more broadly about the information environment in which you are operating.

For instance, any topic you need information about is constantly evolving as new information is added to what is known about the topic. Trained experts, informed amateurs, and opinionated laypeople are publishing in traditional and emerging formats; there is always something new to find out. The scale of information available varies according to topic, but in general it's safe to say that there is more information accessible now than ever before.

Due to the extensive amount of information available, part of becoming more information literate is developing habits of mind and of practice that enable you to continually seek new information and to adapt your understanding of topics according to what you find. Because of the widely varying quality of new information, evaluation is also a key element of information literacy, and will be addressed in the Evaluate chapter of this book.

Finally, while you are busy searching for information on your current topic, be sure to keep your mind open for new avenues or angles of research that you haven't yet considered. Often the

information you found for your initial need will turn out to be the pathway to a rich vein of information that can serve as raw material for many subsequent projects.

When you understand the information environment where your information need is situated, you can begin to define the topic more clearly and you can begin to understand where your research fits in with related work that precedes it. Your information literacy skills will develop against this changing background as you use the same underlying principles to do research on a variety of topics.

From Information Need to Research Question

Norm was abruptly confronted by his lack of knowledge when he realized that he had nothing left to say on his topic after writing half a page. Now that he is aware of that shortcoming, he can take steps to rectify it.

Your own lack of knowledge may become apparent in other ways. When reading an article or textbook, you may notice that something the author refers to is completely new to you. You might realize while out walking that you can't identify any of the trees around your house. You may be assigned a topic you have never heard of.

Exercise: Identifying What You Don't Know

Wherever you are, look around you. Find one thing in your immediate field of view that you can't explain.

What is it that you don't understand about that thing?

What is it that you need to find out so that you can understand it?

How can you express what you need to find out?

For example: You can't explain why your coat repels water. You know that it's plastic, and that it's designed to repel water, but can't explain why this happens. You need to find out what kind of plastic the coat is made of and the chemistry or physics of that plastic and of water that makes the water run off instead of soaking through. (The terminology in your first explanation would get more specific once you did some research.)

All of us lack knowledge in countless areas, but this isn't a bad thing. Once we step back and acknowledge that we don't know

something, it opens up the possibility that we can find out all sorts of interesting things, and that's when the searching begins.

Taking your lack of knowledge and turning it into a search topic or research question starts with being able to state what your lack of knowledge is. Part of this is to state what you already know. It's rare that you'll start a search from absolute zero. Most of the time you've at least heard something about the topic, even if it is just a brief reference in a lecture or reading. Taking stock of what you already know can help you to identify any erroneous assumptions you might be making based on incomplete or biased information. If you think you know something, make sure you find at least a couple of reliable sources to confirm that knowledge before taking it for granted. Use the following exercise to see if there is anything that needs to be supported with background research before proceeding.

Exercise: Taking Stock of What You Already Know

As discussed above, part of identifying your own information need is giving yourself credit for what you already know about your topic. Construct a chart using the following format to list whatever you already know about the topic.

Name your topic at the top.

In the first column, list what you know about your topic.

In the second column, briefly explain how you know this (heard it from the professor, read it in the textbook, saw it on a blog, etc.).

In the last column, rate your confidence in that knowledge. Are you 100% sure of this bit of knowledge, or did you just hear it somewhere and assume it was right?

When you've looked at everything you think you know about the topic and why, step back and look at the chart as a whole. How much do you know about the topic, and how confident are you about it? You may be surprised at how little or how much you already know, but either way you will be aware of your own background on the topic.

This self-awareness is key to becoming more information literate. This exercise gives you a simple way to gauge your starting point, and may help you identify specific gaps in your knowledge of your topic

that you will need to fill as you proceed with your research. It can also be useful to revisit the chart as you work on your project to see how far you've progressed, as well as to double check that you haven't forgotten an area of weakness.

Once you've clearly stated what you do know, it should be easier to state what you don't KWHL1 know. Keep in mind that you are not attempting to state everything you don't know. You are only stating what you don't know in terms of your current information need. This is where you define the limits of what you are searching for. These limits enable you to meet both size requirements and time deadlines for a project. If you state them clearly, they can help to keep you on track as you proceed with your research. You can learn more about this in the Scope chapter of this book.

One useful way to keep your research on track is with a "KWHL" chart. This type of chart enables you to state both what you know and what you want to know, as well as providing space where you can track your planning, searching and evaluation progress. For now, just fill out the first column, but start thinking about the gaps in your knowledge and how they might inform your research questions. You will learn more about developing these questions and the research activities that follow from them as you work through this book.

Defining a research question can be more difficult than it seems. Your initial questions may be too broad or too narrow. You may not be familiar with specialized terminology used in the field you are researching. You may not know if your question is worth investigating at all.

These problems can often be solved by a preliminary investigation of existing published information on the topic. As previously discussed, gaining a general understanding of the information environment helps you to situate your information need in the relevant context and can also make you aware of possible alternative directions for your research. On a more practical note, however, reading through some of the existing information can also provide you with commonly used terminology, which you can then use to state your own research question, as well as in searches for additional information. Don't try to reinvent the wheel, but rely on the experts who have laid the groundwork for you to build upon.

Once you have identified your own lack of knowledge, investigated the existing information on the topic, and set some limits on your research based on your current information need, write out your research question or state your thesis. The next exercise will help

you transform the question you have into an actual thesis statement. You'll find that it's not uncommon to revise your question or thesis statement several times in the course of a research project. As you become more and more knowledgeable about the topic, you will be able to state your ideas more clearly and precisely, until they almost perfectly reflect the information you have found.

Exercise: Research Question/Thesis Statement/Search Terms

Since this chapter is all about determining and expressing your information need, let's follow up on thinking about that with a practical exercise. Follow these steps to get a better grasp of exactly what you are trying to find out, and to identify some initial search terms to get you started.

1. Whatever project you are currently working on, there should be some question you are trying to answer. Write your current version of that question here.
2. Now write your proposed answer to your question. This may be the first draft of your thesis statement which you will attempt to support with your research, or in some cases, the first draft of a hypothesis that you will go on to test experimentally. It doesn't have to be perfect at this point, but based on your current understanding of your topic and what you expect or hope to find is the answer to the question you asked.
3. Look at your question and your thesis/hypothesis, and make a list of the terms common to both lists (excluding "the", "and", "a", etc.). These common terms are likely the important concepts that you will need to research to support your thesis/hypothesis. They may be the most useful search terms overall or they may only be a starting point.

If none of the terms from your question and thesis/hypothesis lists overlap at all, you might want to take a closer look and see if your thesis/hypothesis really answers your research question. If not, you may have arrived at your first opportunity for revision. Does your question really ask what you're trying to find out? Does your proposed answer really answer that question? You may find that you need to change one or both, or to add something to one

or both to really get at what you're interested in. This is part of the process, and you will likely discover that as you gather more information about your topic, you will find other ways that you want to change your question or thesis to align with the facts, even if they are different from what you hoped.

A Wider View

While the identification of an information need is presented in this chapter as the first step in the research process, many times the information need you initially identified will change as you discover new information and connections. Other chapters in this book deal with finding, evaluating, and managing information in a variety of ways and formats. As you become more skilled in using different information resources, you will likely find that the line between the various information literacy skills becomes increasingly blurred, and that you will revisit your initial ideas about your topic in response to both the information you're finding and what you're doing with what that information.

Continually think about your relationship to the information you find. Why are you doing things the way you are? Is it really the best way for your current situation? What other options are there? Keeping an open mind about your use of information will help you to ensure that you take responsibility for the results of that use, and will help you to be more successful in any information-intensive endeavor.

This essay originally appeared in *The Information Literacy User's Guide*, an Open SUNY textbook.

Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement

Learning Objectives

- Understand the elements of a strong, clear thesis statement
- Revise a thesis statement to make it clearer

Have you ever known a person who was not very good at telling stories? You probably had trouble following his train of thought as he jumped around from point to point, either being too brief in places that needed further explanation or providing too many details on a meaningless element. Maybe he told the end of the story first, then moved to the beginning and later added details to the middle. His ideas were probably scattered, and the story did not flow very well. When the story was over, you probably had many questions.

Just as a personal anecdote can be a disorganized mess, an essay can fall into the same trap of being out of order and confusing. That is why writers need a thesis statement to provide a specific focus for their essay and to organize what they are about to discuss in the body.

Just like a topic sentence summarizes a single paragraph, the thesis statement summarizes an entire essay. It tells the reader the point you want to make in your essay, while the essay itself supports that point. It is like a signpost that signals the essay's destination. You should form your thesis before you begin to organize an essay, but you may find that it needs revision as the essay develops.

Elements of a Thesis Statement

For every essay you write, you must focus on a central idea. This idea stems from a topic you have chosen or been assigned or from a question your teacher has asked. It is not enough merely to discuss a general topic or simply answer a question with a yes or no. You have to form

a specific opinion, and then articulate that into a controlling idea—the main idea upon which you build your thesis.

Remember that a thesis is not the topic itself, but rather your interpretation of the question or subject. For whatever topic your professor gives you, you must ask yourself, “What do I want to say about it?” Asking and then answering this question is vital to forming a thesis that is precise, forceful and confident.

A thesis is one sentence long and appears toward the end of your introduction. It is specific and focuses on one to three points of a single idea—points that are able to be demonstrated in the body. It forecasts the content of the essay and suggests how you will organize your information. Remember that a thesis statement does not summarize an issue but rather dissects it.

A Strong Thesis Statement

A strong thesis statement contains the following qualities.

Specificity. A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. As you may recall, the creation of a thesis statement begins when you choose a broad subject and then narrow down its parts until you pinpoint a specific aspect of that topic. For example, health care is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic, such as options for individuals without health care coverage.

Precision. A strong thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and to remain focused on the topic. If the specific topic is options for individuals without health care coverage, then your precise thesis statement must make an exact claim about it, such as that limited options exist for those who are uninsured by their employers. You must further pinpoint what you are going to discuss regarding these limited effects, such as whom they affect and what the cause is.

Ability to be argued. A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement often is not considered arguable. Be sure your thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence.

Ability to be demonstrated. For any claim you make in your thesis, you must be able to provide reasons and examples for your opinion. You can rely on personal observations in order to do this, or you can consult outside sources to demonstrate that what you assert is valid. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details.

Forcefulness. A thesis statement that is forceful shows readers that you are, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose.

Confidence. In addition to using force in your thesis statement, you must also use confidence in your claim. Phrases such as I feel or I believe actually weaken the readers' sense of your confidence because these phrases imply that you are the only person who feels the way you do. In other words, your stance has insufficient backing. Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades your readers to have faith in your argument and open their minds to what you have to say.

Tip

Even in a personal essay that allows the use of first person, your thesis should not contain phrases such as in my opinion or I believe. These statements reduce your credibility and weaken your argument. Your opinion is more convincing when you use a firm attitude.

Examples of Appropriate Thesis Statements

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the following requirements:

- Specificity
- Precision
- Ability to be argued
- Ability to be demonstrated
- Forcefulness
- Confidence

Examples

Ex: The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxon in the play *Fences* symbolize the challenge of black males who lived through segregation and integration in the United States.

Ex: Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one solution that will tackle illegal immigration.

Ex: Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in *Romeo and Juliet* spoils the outcome for the audience and weakens the plot.

Ex: J. D. Salinger's character in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused rebel who voices his disgust with phonies, yet in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions.

Ex: Compared to an absolute divorce, no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown.

Ex: Exposing children from an early age to the dangers of drug abuse is a sure method of preventing future drug addicts.

Ex: In today's crumbling job market, a high school diploma is not significant enough education to land a stable, lucrative job.

Tip

You can find thesis statements in many places, such as in the news; in the opinions of friends, coworkers or teachers; and even in songs you hear on the radio. Become aware of thesis statements in everyday life by paying attention to people's opinions and their reasons for those opinions. Pay attention to your own everyday thesis statements as well, as these can become material for future essays.

Now that you have read about the contents of a good thesis statement and have seen examples, take a look at the pitfalls to avoid when composing your own thesis:

A thesis is weak when it is simply a declaration of your subject or a description of what you will discuss in your essay.

Ex: *Weak thesis statement:* My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge.

A thesis is weak when it makes an unreasonable or outrageous claim or insults the opposing side.

Ex: *Weak thesis statement:* Religious radicals across America are trying to legislate their Puritanical beliefs by banning required high school books.

A thesis is weak when it contains an obvious fact or something that no one can disagree with or provides a dead end.

Ex: Weak thesis statement: Advertising companies use sex to sell their products.

A thesis is weak when the statement is too broad.

Ex: Weak thesis statement: The life of Abraham Lincoln was long and challenging.

WRITING AT WORK

Often in your career, you will need to ask your boss for something through an e-mail. Just as a thesis statement organizes an essay, it can also organize your e-mail request. While your e-mail will be shorter than an essay, using a thesis statement in your first paragraph quickly lets your boss know what you are asking for, why it is necessary, and what the benefits are. In short body paragraphs, you can provide the essential information needed to expand upon your request.

Thesis Statement Revision

Your thesis will probably change as you write, so you will need to modify it to reflect exactly what you have discussed in your essay. Remember that your thesis statement begins as a working thesis statement, an indefinite statement that you make about your topic early in the writing process for the purpose of planning and guiding your writing.

Working thesis statements often become stronger as you gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. Revision helps you strengthen your thesis so that it matches what you have expressed in the body of the paper.

TIP

The best way to revise your thesis statement is to ask questions about it and then examine the answers to those questions. By challenging your own ideas and forming definite reasons for those ideas, you grow closer to a more precise point of view, which you can then incorporate into your thesis statement.

Ways to Revise Your Thesis

You can cut down on irrelevant aspects and revise your thesis by taking the following steps:

1. Pinpoint and replace all nonspecific words, such as people, everything, society, or life, with more precise words in order to reduce any vagueness.

Working thesis: Young people have to work hard to succeed in life.

Revised thesis: Recent college graduates must have discipline and persistence in order to find and maintain a stable job in which they can use and be appreciated for their talents.

The revised thesis makes a more specific statement about success and what it means to work hard. The original includes too broad a range of people and does not define exactly what success entails. By replacing those general words like people and work hard, the writer can better focus his or her research and gain more direction in his or her writing.

2. Clarify ideas that need explanation by asking yourself questions that narrow your thesis.

Working thesis: The welfare system is a joke.

Revised thesis: The welfare system keeps a socioeconomic class from gaining employment by alluring members of that class with unearned income, instead of programs to improve their education and skill sets.

A joke means many things to many people. Readers bring all sorts of backgrounds and perspectives to the reading process and would need clarification for a word so vague. This expression may also be too informal for the selected audience. By asking questions, the writer can devise a more precise and appropriate explanation for joke. The writer should ask himself or herself questions similar to the 5WH questions. (Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? are the 5WH questions). By incorporating the answers to these questions into a thesis statement, the writer more accurately defines his or her stance, which will better guide the writing of the essay.

3. Replace any linking verbs with action verbs. Linking verbs are forms of the verb to be, a verb that simply states that a situation exists.

Working thesis: Kansas City schoolteachers are not paid enough.

Revised thesis: The Kansas City legislature cannot afford to pay its educators, resulting in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers.

The linking verb in this working thesis statement is the word are.

Linking verbs often make thesis statements weak because they do not express action. Rather, they connect words and phrases to the second half of the sentence. Readers might wonder, “Why are they not paid enough?” But this statement does not compel them to ask many more questions. The writer should ask himself or herself questions in order to replace the linking verb with an action verb, thus forming a stronger thesis statement, one that takes a more definitive stance on the issue:

- Who is not paying the teachers enough?
- What is considered “enough”?
- What is the problem?
- What are the results

4. Omit any general claims that are hard to support.

Working thesis: Today’s teenage girls are too sexualized.

Revised thesis: Teenage girls who are captivated by the sexual images on MTV are conditioned to believe that a woman’s worth depends on her sensuality, a feeling that harms their self-esteem and behavior.

It is true that some young women in today’s society are more sexualized than in the past, but that is not true for all girls. Many girls have strict parents, dress appropriately, and do not engage in sexual activity while in middle school and high school. The writer of this thesis should ask the following questions:

- Which teenage girls?
- What constitutes “too” sexualized?
- Why are they behaving that way?
- Where does this behavior show up?
- What are the repercussions?

WRITING AT WORK

In your career you may have to write a project proposal that focuses on a particular problem in your company, such as reinforcing the tardiness policy. The proposal would aim to fix the problem; using a thesis statement would clearly state the boundaries of the problem and tell the goals of the project. After writing the proposal, you may find that the thesis needs revision to reflect exactly what is expressed in the body. Using the techniques from this chapter would apply to revising that thesis.

Key Takeaways

- Proper essays require a thesis statement to provide a specific focus and suggest how the essay will be organized.
 - A thesis statement is your interpretation of the subject, not the topic itself.
 - A strong thesis is specific, precise, forceful, confident, and is able to be demonstrated.
 - A strong thesis challenges readers with a point of view that can be debated and can be supported with evidence.
 - A weak thesis is simply a declaration of your topic or contains an obvious fact that cannot be argued.
 - Depending on your topic, it may or may not be appropriate to use first person point of view.
 - Revise your thesis by ensuring all words are specific, all ideas are exact, and all verbs express action.

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Writing Body Paragraphs

University of Minnesota

Learning Objectives

- Select Primary Support related to your thesis
- Support your topic sentence

If your thesis gives the reader a roadmap to your essay, then body paragraphs should closely follow that map. The reader should be able to predict what follows your introductory paragraph by simply reading the thesis statement.

The body paragraphs present the evidence you have gathered to confirm your thesis. Before you begin to support your thesis in the body, you must find information from a variety of sources that support and give credit to what you are trying to prove.

SELECT PRIMARY SUPPORT FOR YOUR THESIS

Without primary support, your argument is not likely to be convincing. Primary support can be described as the major points you choose to expand on your thesis. It is the most important information you select to argue for your point of view. Each point you choose will be incorporated into the topic sentence for each body paragraph you write. Your primary supporting points are further supported by supporting details within the paragraphs.

TIP

Remember that a worthy argument is backed by examples. In order to construct a valid argument, good writers conduct lots of background research and take careful notes. They also talk to people knowledgeable about a topic in order to understand its implications before writing about it.

IDENTIFY THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD PRIMARY SUPPORT

In order to fulfill the requirements of good primary support, the information you choose must meet the following standards:

- Be specific. The main points you make about your thesis and the examples you use to expand on those points need to be specific. Use specific examples to provide the evidence and to build upon your general ideas. These types of examples give your reader something narrow to focus on, and if used properly, they leave little doubt about your claim. General examples, while they convey the necessary information, are not nearly as compelling or useful in writing because they are too obvious and typical.

- Be relevant to the thesis. Primary support is considered strong when it relates directly to the thesis. Primary support should show, explain, or prove your main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with lots of information that could be used to prove your thesis, you may think you need to include it all in your body paragraphs. But effective writers resist the temptation to lose focus. Choose your examples wisely by making sure they directly connect to your thesis.

- Be detailed. Remember that your thesis, while specific, should not be very detailed. The body paragraphs are where you develop the discussion that a thorough essay requires. Using detailed support shows readers that you have considered all the facts and chosen only the most precise details to enhance your point of view.

PREWRITE TO IDENTIFY PRIMARY SUPPORTING POINTS FOR A THESIS STATEMENT

Recall that when you prewrite you essentially make a list of examples or reasons why you support your stance. Stemming from each point, you further provide details to support those reasons. After prewriting, you are then able to look back at the information and choose the most compelling pieces you will use in your body paragraphs.

Exercise 1

Choose one of the following working thesis statements. On a separate sheet of paper, write for at least five minutes using one of

the prewriting techniques you learned in Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”.

- Unleashed dogs on city streets are a dangerous nuisance.
- Students cheat for many different reasons.
- Drug use among teens and young adults is a problem.
- The most important change that should occur at my college or university is _____.

SELECT THE MOST EFFECTIVE PRIMARY SUPPORTING POINTS FOR A THESIS STATEMENT

After you have prewritten about your working thesis statement, you may have generated a lot of information, which may be edited out later. Remember that your primary support must be relevant to your thesis. Remind yourself of your main argument, and delete any ideas that do not directly relate to it. Omitting unrelated ideas ensures that you will use only the most convincing information in your body paragraphs. Choose at least three of only the most compelling points. These will serve as the topic sentences for your body paragraphs.

Exercise 2

Refer to the previous exercise and select three of your most compelling reasons to support the thesis statement. Remember that the points you choose must be specific and relevant to the thesis. The statements you choose will be your primary support points, and you will later incorporate them into the topic sentences for the body paragraphs.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

When you support your thesis, you are revealing evidence.

Evidence includes anything that can help support your stance. The following are the kinds of evidence you will encounter as you conduct your research:

Facts. Facts are the best kind of evidence to use because they often cannot be disputed. They can support your stance by providing background information on or a solid foundation for your point of view. However, some facts may still need explanation. For example, the sentence “The most populated state in the United States is California” is a pure fact, but it may require some explanation to make it relevant to your specific argument.

Judgments. Judgments are conclusions drawn from the given facts. Judgments are more credible than opinions because they are founded upon careful reasoning and examination of a topic.

Testimony. Testimony consists of direct quotations from either an eyewitness or an expert witness. An eyewitness is someone who has direct experience with a subject; he adds authenticity to an argument based on facts. An expert witness is a person who has extensive experience with a topic. This person studies the facts and provides commentary based on either facts or judgments, or both. An expert witness adds authority and credibility to an argument.

Personal observation. Personal observation is similar to testimony, but personal observation consists of your testimony. It reflects what you know to be true because you have experiences and have formed either opinions or judgments about them. For instance, if you are one of five children and your thesis states that being part of a large family is beneficial to a child’s social development, you could use your own experience to support your thesis.

WRITING AT WORK

In any job where you devise a plan, you will need to support the steps that you lay out. This is an area in which you would incorporate primary support into your writing. Choosing only the most specific and relevant information to expand upon the steps will ensure that your plan appears well-thought-out and precise.

TIP

You can consult a vast pool of resources to gather support for your stance. Citing relevant information from reliable sources ensures that your reader will take you seriously and consider your

assertions. Use any of the following sources for your essay: newspapers or news organization websites, magazines, encyclopedias, and scholarly journals, which are periodicals that address topics in a specialized field.

CHOOSE SUPPORTING TOPIC SENTENCES

Each body paragraph contains a topic sentence that states one aspect of your thesis and then expands upon it. Like the thesis statement, each topic sentence should be specific and supported by concrete details, facts, or explanations.

Each body paragraph should comprise the following elements.

topic sentence + supporting details (examples, reasons, or arguments)

Topic sentences indicate the location and main points of the basic arguments of your essay. These sentences are vital to writing your body paragraphs because they always refer back to and support your thesis statement. Topic sentences are linked to the ideas you have introduced in your thesis, thus reminding readers what your essay is about. A paragraph without a clearly identified topic sentence may be unclear and scattered, just like an essay without a thesis statement.

TIP

Unless your teacher instructs otherwise, you should include at least three body paragraphs in your essay. A five-paragraph essay, including the introduction and conclusion, is commonly the standard for exams and essay assignments.

Consider the following the thesis statement:

Author J.D. Salinger relied primarily on his personal life and belief system as the foundation for the themes in the majority of his works.

The following topic sentence is a primary support point for the thesis. The topic sentence states exactly what the controlling idea of the paragraph is. Later, you will see the writer immediately provide support for the sentence.

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced themes in many of his works.

Exercise 3

In “Exercise 2”, you chose three of your most convincing points to support the thesis statement you selected from the list. Take each point and incorporate it into a topic sentence for each body paragraph.

Supporting	point	1:
<hr/>		
Topic		sentence:
<hr/>		
Supporting	point	2:
<hr/>		
Topic		sentence:
<hr/>		
Supporting	point	3:
<hr/>		
Topic		sentence:
<hr/>		

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

DRAFT SUPPORTING DETAIL SENTENCES FOR EACH PRIMARY SUPPORT SENTENCE

After deciding which primary support points you will use as your topic sentences, you must add details to clarify and demonstrate each of those

points. These supporting details provide examples, facts, or evidence that support the topic sentence.

The writer drafts possible supporting detail sentences for each primary support sentence based on the thesis statement:

The following paragraph contains supporting detail sentences for the primary support sentence (the topic sentence), which is underlined.

Exercise 4

Using the three topic sentences you composed for the thesis statement in “Exercise 1”, draft at least three supporting details for each point.

Thesis statement:	
Primary supporting point	1:
Supporting details:	
Primary supporting point	2:
Supporting details:	
Primary supporting point	3:
Supporting details:	

TIP

You have the option of writing your topic sentences in one of three ways. You can state it at the beginning of the body paragraph, or at the end of the paragraph, or you do not have to write it at all. This is called an implied topic sentence. An implied topic sentence lets readers form the main idea for themselves. For beginning writers, it is best to not use implied topic sentences because it makes it harder to focus your writing. Your instructor

may also want to clearly identify the sentences that support your thesis.

TIP

Print out the first draft of your essay and use a highlighter to mark your topic sentences in the body paragraphs. Make sure they are clearly stated and accurately present your paragraphs, as well as accurately reflect your thesis. If your topic sentence contains information that does not exist in the rest of the paragraph, rewrite it to more accurately match the rest of the paragraph.

Key Takeaways

- Your body paragraphs should closely follow the path set forth by your thesis statement.
- Strong body paragraphs contain evidence that supports your thesis.
- Primary support comprises the most important points you use to support your thesis.
- Strong primary support is specific, detailed, and relevant to the thesis.
- Prewriting helps you determine your most compelling primary support.
- Evidence includes facts, judgments, testimony, and personal observation.
- Reliable sources may include newspapers, magazines, academic journals, books, encyclopedias, and firsthand testimony.
- A topic sentence presents one point of your thesis statement while the information in the rest of the paragraph supports that point.
- A body paragraph comprises a topic sentence plus supporting details.

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Part 3: Research

Research motivates most of our writing, whether formally or informally. It is not, however, a natural skill. Though many of us may navigate the Internet with ease, the type of research necessary for college writing requires skilled practice and obeys certain rules. Here, we'll see an overview of these rules and procedures and review the correct way to incorporate others' thoughts in our own work.

Within your own campus community, and with each new class, you may find different standards and expectations for research will apply. This book cannot cover every example; however, it should give you a basis from which to build. As you encounter more demanding research requirements, never hesitate to reach out to the real research experts on your campus: your college librarians!

Strategies for Gathering Reliable Information

Successful Writing, v. 1.0

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish between primary and secondary sources.
- Identify strategies for locating relevant print and electronic resources efficiently.
- Identify instances when it is appropriate to use human sources, such as interviews or eyewitness testimony.
- Identify criteria for evaluating research resources.
- Understand why many electronic resources are not reliable.

Now that you have planned your research project, you are ready to begin the research. This phase can be both exciting and challenging. As you read this section, you will learn ways to locate sources efficiently, so you have enough time to read the sources, take notes, and think about how to use the information.

Of course, the technological advances of the past few decades—particularly the rise of online media—mean that, as a twenty-first-century student, you have countless sources of information available at your fingertips. But how can you tell whether a source is reliable? This section will discuss strategies for evaluating sources critically so that you can be a media-savvy researcher.

In this section, you will locate and evaluate resources for your paper and begin taking notes. As you read, begin gathering print and electronic resources, identify at least eight to ten sources by the time you finish the chapter, and begin taking notes on your research findings.

Locating Useful Resources

When you chose a paper topic and determined your research questions,

you conducted preliminary research to stimulate your thinking. Your research proposal included some general ideas for how to go about your research—for instance, interviewing an expert in the field or analyzing the content of popular magazines. You may even have identified a few potential sources. Now it is time to conduct a more focused, systematic search for informative primary and secondary sources.

Using Primary and Secondary Sources

Writers classify research resources in two categories: primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources are direct, firsthand sources of information or data. For example, if you were writing a paper about the First Amendment right to freedom of speech, the text of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights would be a primary source.

Other primary sources include the following:

- Research articles
- Literary texts
- Historical documents such as diaries or letters
- Autobiographies or other personal accounts

Secondary sources discuss, interpret, analyze, consolidate, or otherwise rework information from primary sources. In researching a paper about the First Amendment, you might read articles about legal cases that involved First Amendment rights, or editorials expressing commentary on the First Amendment. These sources would be considered secondary sources because they are one step removed from the primary source of information.

The following are examples of secondary sources:

- Magazine articles
- Biographical books
- Literary and scientific reviews
- Television documentaries

Your topic and purpose determine whether you must cite both primary and secondary sources in your paper. Ask yourself which sources are most likely to provide the information that will answer your research questions. If you are writing a research paper about reality television shows, you will need to use some reality shows as a primary source, but secondary sources, such as a reviewer's critique, are also important. If you are writing about the health effects of nicotine, you will probably

want to read the published results of scientific studies, but secondary sources, such as magazine articles discussing the outcome of a recent study, may also be helpful.

Once you have thought about what kinds of sources are most likely to help you answer your research questions, you may begin your search for print and electronic resources. The challenge here is to conduct your search efficiently. Writers use strategies to help them find the sources that are most relevant and reliable while steering clear of sources that will not be useful.

Finding Print Resources

Print resources include a vast array of documents and publications. Regardless of your topic, you will consult some print resources as part of your research. (You will use electronic sources as well, but it is not wise to limit yourself to electronic sources only, because some potentially useful sources may be available only in print form.) Table 11.1 “Library Print Resources” lists different types of print resources available at public and university libraries.

<i>Resource Type</i>	<i>Description</i>
Reference works	<p>Reference works provide a summary of information about a particular topic. Almanacs, encyclopedias, atlases, medical reference books, and scientific abstracts are examples of reference works. In some cases, reference books may not be checked out of a library.</p> <p>Note that reference works are many steps removed from original primary sources and are often brief, so these should be used only as a starting point when you gather information.</p>
Nonfiction books	<p>Nonfiction books provide in-depth coverage of a topic. Trade books, biographies, and how-to guides are usually written for a general audience. Scholarly books and scientific studies are usually written for an audience that has specialized knowledge of a topic.</p>
Periodicals and news sources	<p>These sources are published at regular intervals—daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Newspapers, magazines, and academic journals are examples. Some periodicals provide articles on subjects of general interest, while others are more specialized.</p>
Government publications	<p>Federal, state, and local government agencies publish information on a variety of topics. Government publications include reports, legislation, court documents, public records, statistics, studies, guides, programs, and forms.</p>
Business and nonprofit publications	<p>Businesses and nonprofit organizations produce publications designed to market a product, provide background about the organization, provide information on topics connected to the organization, or promote a cause. These publications include reports, newsletters, advertisements, manuals, brochures, and other print documents.</p>

Table 11.1 Library Print Resources

Some of these resources are also widely available in electronic format. In addition to the resources noted in the table, library holdings may include primary texts such as historical documents, letters, and diaries.

Writing at Work

Businesses, government organizations, and nonprofit organizations produce published materials that range from brief advertisements and brochures to lengthy, detailed reports. In many cases, producing these publications requires research. A corporation's annual report may include research about economic or industry trends. A charitable organization may use information from research in materials sent to potential donors.

Regardless of the industry you work in, you may be asked to assist in developing materials for publication. Often, incorporating research in these documents can make them more effective in informing or persuading readers.

Tip

As you gather information, strive for a balance of accessible, easy-to-read sources and more specialized, challenging sources. Relying solely on lightweight books and articles written for a general audience will drastically limit the range of useful, substantial information. On the other hand, restricting oneself to dense, scholarly works could make the process of researching extremely time-consuming and frustrating.

Exercise 1

Make a list of five types of print resources you could use to find information about your research topic. Include at least one primary source. Be as specific as possible—if you have a particular resource or type of resource in mind, describe it.

To find print resources efficiently, first identify the major concepts and terms you will use to conduct your search—that is,

your keywords. These will help you find sources using any of the following methods:

- Using the library's online catalog or card catalog
- Using periodicals indexes and databases
- Consulting a reference librarian

You probably already have some keywords in mind based on your preliminary research and writing. Another way to identify useful keywords is to visit the Library of Congress's website at <http://id.loc.gov/authorities>. This site allows you to search for a topic and see the related subject headings used by the Library of Congress, including broader terms, narrower terms, and related terms. Other libraries use these terms to classify materials. Knowing the most-used terms will help you speed up your keyword search.

Jorge used the Library of Congress site to identify general terms he could use to find resources about low-carb dieting. His search helped him identify potentially useful keywords and related topics, such as carbohydrates in human nutrition, glycemic index, and carbohydrates—metabolism. These terms helped Jorge refine his search.

Tip

Knowing the right keywords can sometimes make all the difference in conducting a successful search. If you have trouble finding sources on a topic, consult a librarian to see whether you need to modify your search terms.

Exercise 2

Visit the Library of Congress's website at <http://id.loc.gov/authorities> and conduct searches on a few terms related to your topic.

1. Review your search results and identify six to eight additional terms you might use when you conduct your research.
2. Print out the search results or save the results to your research folder on your computer or portable storage device.

Using Periodicals, Indexes, and Databases

Library catalogs can help you locate book-length sources, as well as some types of nonprint holdings, such as CDs, DVDs, and audio books. To locate shorter sources, such as magazine and journal articles, you will need to use a periodical index or an online periodical database. These tools index the articles that appear in newspapers, magazines, and journals. Like catalogs, they provide publication information about an article and often allow users to access a summary or even the full text of the article.

Print indexes may be available in the periodicals section of your library. Increasingly, libraries use online databases that users can access through the library website. A single library may provide access to multiple periodical databases. These can range from general news databases to specialized databases. Table 11.2 “Commonly Used Indexes and Databases” describes some commonly used indexes and databases.

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Format</i>	<i>Contents</i>
<i>New York Times Index</i>	Print	Guide to articles published in the New York Times
ProQuest	Online	Database that archives content from newspapers, magazines, and dissertations
Psychlit, PsycINFO	Online	Databases that archive content from journals in psychology and psychiatry
Business Source Complete	Online	Database that archives business-related content from magazines and journals
MEDLINE, PubMed	Online	Databases that archive articles in medicine and health
EBSCOhost	Online	General database that provides access to articles on a wide variety of topics

Table 11.2 Commonly Used Indexes and Databases

Reading Popular and Scholarly Periodicals

When you search for periodicals, be sure to distinguish among different types. Mass-market publications, such as newspapers and popular magazines, differ from scholarly publications in their accessibility, audience, and purpose.

Newspapers and magazines are written for a broader audience than scholarly journals. Their content is usually quite accessible and easy to read. Trade magazines that target readers within a particular industry may presume the reader has background knowledge, but these publications are still reader-friendly for a broader audience. Their purpose is to inform and, often, to entertain or persuade readers as well.

Scholarly or academic journals are written for a much smaller and more expert audience. The creators of these publications assume that most of their readers are already familiar with the main topic of the journal. The target audience is also highly educated. Informing is the primary purpose of a scholarly journal. While a journal article may advance an agenda or advocate a position, the content will still be presented in an objective style and formal tone. Entertaining readers with breezy comments and splashy graphics is not a priority.

Because of these differences, scholarly journals are more challenging to read. That doesn't mean you should avoid them. On the contrary, they can provide in-depth information unavailable elsewhere. Because knowledgeable professionals carefully review the content before publication, scholarly journals are far more reliable than much of the information available in popular media. Seek out academic journals along with other resources. Just be prepared to spend a little more time processing the information.

Writing at Work

Periodicals databases are not just for students writing research papers. They also provide a valuable service to workers in various fields. The owner of a small business might use a database such as Business Source Premiere to find articles on management, finance, or trends within a particular industry. Health care professionals might consult databases such as MedLine to research a particular disease or medication. Regardless of what career path you plan to pursue, periodicals databases can be a useful tool for researching specific topics and identifying periodicals that will help you keep up with the latest news in your industry.

Consulting a Reference Librarian

Sifting through library stacks and database search results to find the information you need can be like trying to find a needle in a haystack. If you are not sure how you should begin your search, or if it is yielding too many or too few results, you are not alone. Many students find this process challenging, although it does get easier with experience. One way to learn better search strategies is to consult a reference librarian.

Reference librarians are intimately familiar with the systems libraries use to organize and classify information. They can help you locate a particular book in the library stacks, steer you toward useful reference works, and provide tips on how to use databases and other electronic research tools. Take the time to see what resources you can find on your own, but if you encounter difficulties, ask for help. Many university librarians hold virtual office hours and are available for online chatting.

Exercise 3

Visit your library's website or consult with a reference librarian to determine what periodicals indexes or databases would be useful for your research. Depending on your topic, you may rely on a general news index, a specialized index for a particular subject area, or both. Search the catalog for your topic and related keywords. Print out or bookmark your search results.

1. Identify at least one to two relevant periodicals, indexes, or databases.
2. Conduct a keyword search to find potentially relevant articles on your topic.
3. Save your search results. If the index you are using provides article summaries, read these to determine how useful the articles are likely to be.
4. Identify at least three to five articles to review more closely. If the full article is available online, set aside time to read it. If not, plan to visit our library within the next few days to locate the articles you need.

Tip

One way to refine your keyword search is to use Boolean operators. These operators allow you to combine keywords, find variations on a word, and otherwise expand or limit your results. Here are some of the ways you can use Boolean operators:

- Combine keywords with and or + to limit results to citations that include both keywords—for example, diet + nutrition.
- Combine keywords with not or – to search for the first word without the second. This can help you eliminate irrelevant results based on words that are similar to your search term. For example, searching for obesity not childhood locates materials on obesity but excludes materials on childhood obesity.

- Enclose a phrase in quotation marks to search for an exact phrase, such as “morbid obesity.”
- Use parentheses to direct the order of operations in a search string. For example, since Type II diabetes is also known as adult-onset diabetes, you could search (Type II or adult-onset) and diabetes to limit your search results to articles on this form of the disease.
- Use a wildcard symbol such as #, ?, or \$ after a word to search for variations on a term. For instance, you might type diabet# to search for information on diabetes and diabetics. The specific symbol used varies with different databases.

Finding and Using Electronic Resources

With the expansion of technology and media over the past few decades, a wealth of information is available to you in electronic format. Some types of resources, such as a television documentary, may only be available electronically. Other resources—for instance, many newspapers and magazines—may be available in both print and electronic form. The following are some of the electronic sources you might consult:

- Online databases
- CD-ROMs
- Popular web search engines
- Websites maintained by businesses, universities, nonprofit organizations, or government agencies
- Newspapers, magazines, and journals published on the web
- E-books
- Audio books
- Industry blogs
- Radio and television programs and other audio and video recordings
- Online discussion groups

The techniques you use to locate print resources can also help you find electronic resources efficiently. Libraries usually include CD-ROMs, audio books, and audio and video recordings among their holdings. You can locate these materials in the catalog using a keyword search.

The same Boolean operators used to refine database searches can help you filter your results in popular search engines.

Using Internet Search Engines Efficiently

When faced with the challenge of writing a research paper, some students rely on popular search engines as their first source of information. Typing a keyword or phrase into a search engine instantly pulls up links to dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of related websites—what could be easier? Unfortunately, despite its apparent convenience, this research strategy has the following drawbacks to consider:

- **Results do not always appear in order of reliability.** The first few hits that appear in search results may include sites whose content is not always reliable, such as online encyclopedias that can be edited by any user. Because websites are created by third parties, the search engine cannot tell you which sites have accurate information.
- **Results may be too numerous for you to use.** The amount of information available on the web is far greater than the amount of information housed within a particular library or database. Realistically, if your web search pulls up thousands of hits, you will not be able to visit every site—and the most useful sites may be buried deep within your search results.
- **Search engines are not connected to the results of the search.** Search engines find websites that people visit often and list the results in order of popularity. The search engine, then, is not connected to any of the results. When you cite a source found through a search engine, you do not need to cite the search engine. Only cite the source.

A general web search can provide a helpful overview of a topic and may pull up genuinely useful resources. To get the most out of a search engine, however, use strategies to make your search more efficient. Use multiple keywords and Boolean operators to limit your results. Click on the Advanced Search link on the homepage to find additional options for streamlining your search. Depending on the specific search engine you use, the following options may be available:

- Limit results to websites that have been updated within a particular time frame.
- Limit results by language or country.
- Limit results to scholarly works available online.

- Limit results by file type.
- Limit results to a particular domain type, such as .edu (school and university sites) or .gov (government sites). This is a quick way to filter out commercial sites, which can often lead to more objective results.

Use the Bookmarks or Favorites feature of your web browser to save and organize sites that look promising.

Using Other Information Sources: Interviews

With so many print and electronic media readily available, it is easy to overlook another valuable information resource: other people. Consider whether you could use a person or group as a primary source. For instance, you might interview a professor who has expertise in a particular subject, a worker within a particular industry, or a representative from a political organization. Interviews can be a great way to get firsthand information.

To get the most out of an interview, you will need to plan ahead. Contact your subject early in the research process and explain your purpose for requesting an interview. Prepare detailed questions. Open-ended questions, rather than questions with simple yes-or-no answers, are more likely to lead to an in-depth discussion. Schedule a time to meet, and be sure to obtain your subject's permission to record the interview. Take careful notes and be ready to ask follow-up questions based on what you learn.

Tip

If scheduling an in-person meeting is difficult, consider arranging a telephone interview or asking your subject to respond to your questions via e-mail. Recognize that any of these formats takes time and effort. Be prompt and courteous, avoid going over the allotted interview time, and be flexible if your subject needs to reschedule.

Evaluating Research Resources

As you gather sources, you will need to examine them with a critical eye. Smart researchers continually ask themselves two questions: "Is this source relevant to my purpose?" and "Is this source reliable?" The

first question will help you avoid wasting valuable time reading sources that stray too far from your specific topic and research questions. The second question will help you find accurate, trustworthy sources.

Determining Whether a Source Is Relevant

At this point in your research process, you may have identified dozens of potential sources. It is easy for writers to get so caught up in checking out books and printing out articles that they forget to ask themselves how they will use these resources in their research. Now is a good time to get a little ruthless. Reading and taking notes takes time and energy, so you will want to focus on the most relevant sources.

To weed through your stack of books and articles, skim their contents. Read quickly with your research questions and subtopics in mind. Table 11.3 “Tips for Skimming Books and Articles” explains how to skim to get a quick sense of what topics are covered. If a book or article is not especially relevant, put it aside. You can always come back to it later if you need to.

Tips for Skimming Books	Tips for Skimming Articles
<div>1. Read the dust jacket and table of contents for a broad overview of the topics covered.</div> <div>2. Use the index to locate more specific topics and see how thoroughly they are covered.</div> <div>3. Flip through the book and look for subtitles or key terms that correspond to your research.</div>	<div>1. Skim the introduction and conclusion for summary material.</div> <div>2. Skim through subheadings and text features such as sidebars.</div> <div>3. Look for keywords related to your topic.</div> <div>4. Journal articles often begin with an abstract or summary of the contents. Read it to determine the article’s relevance to your research.</div>

Table 11.3 Tips for Skimming Books and Articles

Determining Whether a Source Is Reliable

All information sources are not created equal. Sources can vary greatly in terms of how carefully they are researched, written, edited, and reviewed for accuracy. Common sense will help you identify obviously questionable sources, such as tabloids that feature tales of alien

abductions, or personal websites with glaring typos. Sometimes, however, a source's reliability—or lack of it—is not so obvious.

To evaluate your research sources, you will use critical thinking skills consciously and deliberately. You will consider criteria such as the type of source, its intended purpose and audience, the author's (or authors') qualifications, the publication's reputation, any indications of bias or hidden agendas, how current the source is, and the overall quality of the writing, thinking, and design.

Evaluating Types of Sources

The different types of sources you will consult are written for distinct purposes and with different audiences in mind. This accounts for other differences, such as the following:

- How thoroughly the writers cover a given topic
- How carefully the writers research and document facts
- How editors review the work
- What biases or agendas affect the content

A journal article written for an academic audience for the purpose of expanding scholarship in a given field will take an approach quite different from a magazine feature written to inform a general audience. Textbooks, hard news articles, and websites approach a subject from different angles as well. To some extent, the type of source provides clues about its overall depth and reliability. Table 11.4 “Source Rankings” ranks different source types.

Table 11.4 Source Rankings

High-Quality Sources

These sources provide the most in-depth information. They are researched and written by subject matter experts and are carefully reviewed.

- Scholarly books and articles in scholarly journals
 - Trade books and magazines geared toward an educated general audience, such as Smithsonian Magazine or Nature
 - Government documents, such as books, reports, and web pages
 - Documents posted online by reputable organizations, such as universities and research institutes
 - Textbooks and reference books, which are usually reliable but may not cover a topic in great depth
-

Varied-Quality Sources

These sources are often useful. However, they do not cover subjects in as much depth as high-quality sources, and they are not always rigorously researched and reviewed. Some, such as popular magazine articles or company brochures, may be written to market a product or a cause. Use them with caution.

- News stories and feature articles (print or online) from reputable newspapers, magazines, or organizations, such as Newsweek or the Public Broadcasting Service
 - Popular magazine articles, which may or may not be carefully researched and fact checked
 - Documents published by businesses and nonprofit organizations
-

Questionable Sources

These sources should be avoided. They are often written primarily to attract a large readership or present the author's opinions and are not subject to careful review.

- Loosely regulated or unregulated media content, such as Internet discussion boards, blogs, free online encyclopedias, talk radio shows, television news shows with obvious political biases, personal websites, and chat rooms

Tip

Free online encyclopedias and wikis may seem like a great source of information. They usually appear among the first few results of a web search. They cover thousands of topics, and many articles use an informal, straightforward writing style. Unfortunately, these sites have no control system for researching, writing, and reviewing articles. Instead, they rely on a community of users to police themselves. At best, these sites can be a starting point for finding other, more trustworthy sources. Never use them as final sources.

Evaluating Credibility and Reputability

Even when you are using a type of source that is generally reliable, you will still need to evaluate the author's credibility and the publication itself on an individual basis. To examine the author's credibility—that is, how much you can believe of what the author has to say—examine his or her credentials. What career experience or academic study shows that the author has the expertise to write about this topic?

Keep in mind that expertise in one field is no guarantee of expertise in another, unrelated area. For instance, an author may have an advanced degree in physiology, but this credential is not a valid qualification for writing about psychology. Check credentials carefully.

Just as important as the author's credibility is the publication's overall reputability. Reputability refers to a source's standing and reputation as a respectable, reliable source of information. An established and well-known newspaper, such as the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal, is more reputable than a college newspaper

put out by comparatively inexperienced students. A website that is maintained by a well-known, respected organization and regularly updated is more reputable than one created by an unknown author or group.

If you are using articles from scholarly journals, you can check databases that keep count of how many times each article has been cited in other articles. This can be a rough indication of the article's quality or, at the very least, of its influence and reputation among other scholars.

Checking for Biases and Hidden Agendas

Whenever you consult a source, always think carefully about the author's or authors' purpose in presenting the information. Few sources present facts completely objectively. In some cases, the source's content and tone are significantly influenced by biases or hidden agendas.

Bias refers to favoritism or prejudice toward a particular person or group. For instance, an author may be biased against a certain political party and present information in a way that subtly—or not so subtly—makes that organization look bad. Bias can lead an author to present facts selectively, edit quotations to misrepresent someone's words, and distort information.

Hidden agendas are goals that are not immediately obvious but influence how an author presents the facts. For instance, an article about the role of beef in a healthy diet would be questionable if it were written by a representative of the beef industry—or by the president of an animal-rights organization. In both cases, the author would likely have a hidden agenda.

As Jorge conducted his research, he read several research studies in which scientists found significant benefits to following a low-carbohydrate diet. He also noticed that many studies were sponsored by a foundation associated with the author of a popular series of low-carbohydrate diet books. Jorge read these studies with a critical eye, knowing that a hidden agenda might be shaping the researchers' conclusions.

Using Current Sources

Be sure to seek out sources that are current, or up to date. Depending on the topic, sources may become outdated relatively soon after publication, or they may remain useful for years. For instance, online social networking sites have evolved rapidly over the past few years. An article published in 2002 about this topic will not provide current information. On the other hand, a research paper on elementary

education practices might refer to studies published decades ago by influential child psychologists.

When using websites for research, check to see when the site was last updated. Many sites publish this information on the homepage, and some, such as news sites, are updated daily or weekly. Many nonfunctioning links are a sign that a website is not regularly updated. Do not be afraid to ask your professor for suggestions if you find that many of your most relevant sources are not especially reliable—or that the most reliable sources are not relevant.

Evaluating Overall Quality by Asking Questions

When you evaluate a source, you will consider the criteria previously discussed as well as your overall impressions of its quality. Read carefully, and notice how well the author presents and supports his or her statements. Stay actively engaged—do not simply accept an author's words as truth. Ask questions to determine each source's value. Checklist 11.1 lists ten questions to ask yourself as a critical reader.

Checklist 11.1

Source Evaluation

- Is the type of source appropriate for my purpose? Is it a high-quality source or one that needs to be looked at more critically?
- Can I establish that the author is credible and the publication is reputable?
- Does the author support ideas with specific facts and details that are carefully documented? Is the source of the author's information clear? (When you use secondary sources, look for sources that are not too removed from primary research.)
- Does the source include any factual errors or instances of faulty logic?
- Does the author leave out any information that I would expect to see in a discussion of this topic?
- Do the author's conclusions logically follow from the evidence that is presented? Can I see how the author got from one point to another?
- Is the writing clear and organized, and is it free from errors, clichés, and empty buzzwords? Is the tone

objective, balanced, and reasonable? (Be on the lookout for extreme, emotionally charged language.)

- Are there any obvious biases or agendas? Based on what I know about the author, are there likely to be any hidden agendas?
- Are graphics informative, useful, and easy to understand? Are websites organized, easy to navigate, and free of clutter like flashing ads and unnecessary sound effects?
- Is the source contradicted by information found in other sources? (If so, it is possible that your sources are presenting similar information but taking different perspectives, which requires you to think carefully about which sources you find more convincing and why. Be suspicious, however, of any source that presents facts that you cannot confirm elsewhere.)

Writing at Work

The critical thinking skills you use to evaluate research sources as a student are equally valuable when you conduct research on the job. If you follow certain periodicals or websites, you have probably identified publications that consistently provide reliable information. Reading blogs and online discussion groups is a great way to identify new trends and hot topics in a particular field, but these sources should not be used for substantial research.

Exercise 4

Use a search engine to conduct a web search on your topic. Refer to the tips provided earlier to help you streamline your search. Evaluate your search results critically based on the criteria you have learned. Identify and bookmark one or more websites that are reliable, reputable, and likely to be useful in your research.

Managing Source Information

As you determine which sources you will rely on most, it is important to establish a system for keeping track of your sources and taking notes. There are several ways to go about it, and no one system is necessarily

superior. What matters is that you keep materials in order; record bibliographical information you will need later; and take detailed, organized notes.

Keeping Track of Your Sources

Think ahead to a moment a few weeks from now, when you've written your research paper and are almost ready to submit it for a grade. There is just one task left—writing your list of sources.

As you begin typing your list, you realize you need to include the publication information for a book you cited frequently. Unfortunately, you already returned it to the library several days ago. You do not remember the URLs for some of the websites you used or the dates you accessed them—information that also must be included in your bibliography. With a sinking feeling, you realize that finding this information and preparing your bibliography will require hours of work.

This stressful scenario can be avoided. Taking time to organize source information now will ensure that you are not scrambling to find it at the last minute. Throughout your research, record bibliographical information for each source as soon as you begin using it. You may use pen-and-paper methods, such as a notebook or note cards, or maintain an electronic list. (If you prefer the latter option, many office software packages include separate programs for recording bibliographic information.)

Table 11.5 “Details for Commonly Used Source Types” shows the specific details you should record for commonly used source types. Use these details to develop a working bibliography—a preliminary list of sources that you will later use to develop the references section of your paper. You may wish to record information using the formatting system of the American Psychological Association (APA) or the Modern Language Association (MLA), which will save a step later on.

<i>Source Type</i>	<i>Necessary Information</i>
Book	Author(s), title and subtitle, publisher, city of publication, year of publication
Essay or article published in a book	Include all the information you would for any other book. Additionally, record the essay's or article's title, author(s), the pages on which it appears, and the name of the book's editor(s).
Periodical	Author(s), article title, publication title, date of publication, volume and issue number, and page numbers
Online source	Author(s) (if available), article or document title, organization that sponsors the site, database name (if applicable), date of publication, date you accessed the site, and URL
Interview	Name of person interviewed, method of communication, date of interview

Table 11.5 Details for Commonly Used Source Types

Exercise 5

Create a working bibliography using the format that is most convenient for you. List at least five sources you plan to use. Continue to add sources to your working bibliography throughout the research process.

Tip

To make your working bibliography even more complete, you may wish to record additional details, such as a book's call number or contact information for a person you interviewed. That way, if you need to locate a source again, you have all the information you need right at your fingertips. You may also wish

to assign each source a code number to use when taking notes (1, 2, 3, or a similar system).

Taking Notes Efficiently

Good researchers stay focused and organized as they gather information from sources. Before you begin taking notes, take a moment to step back and think about your goal as a researcher—to find information that will help you answer your research question. When you write your paper, you will present your conclusions about the topic supported by research. That goal will determine what information you record and how you organize it.

Writers sometimes get caught up in taking extensive notes, so much so that they lose sight of how their notes relate to the questions and ideas they started out with. Remember that you do not need to write down every detail from your reading. Focus on finding and recording details that will help you answer your research questions. The following strategies will help you take notes efficiently.

Use Headings to Organize Ideas

Whether you use old-fashioned index cards or organize your notes using word-processing software, record just one major point from each source at a time, and use a heading to summarize the information covered. Keep all your notes in one file, digital or otherwise. Doing so will help you identify connections among different pieces of information. It will also help you make connections between your notes and the research questions and subtopics you identified earlier.

Know When to Summarize, Paraphrase, or Directly Quote a Source

Your notes will fall under three categories—summary notes, paraphrased information, and direct quotations from your sources. Effective researchers make choices about which type of notes is most appropriate for their purpose.

- Summary notes sum up the main ideas in a source in a few sentences or a short paragraph. A summary is considerably shorter than the original text and captures only the major ideas. Use summary notes when you do not need to record

specific details but you intend to refer to broad concepts the author discusses.

- Paraphrased notes restate a fact or idea from a source using your own words and sentence structure.
- Direct quotations use the exact wording used by the original source and enclose the quoted material in quotation marks.

It is a good strategy to copy direct quotations when an author expresses an idea in an especially lively or memorable way. However, do not rely exclusively on direct quotations in your note taking.

Most of your notes should be paraphrased from the original source. Paraphrasing as you take notes is usually a better strategy than copying direct quotations, because it forces you to think through the information in your source and understand it well enough to restate it. In short, it helps you stay engaged with the material instead of simply copying and pasting. Synthesizing will help you later when you begin planning and drafting your paper.

Maintain Complete, Accurate Notes

Regardless of the format used, any notes you take should include enough information to help you organize ideas and locate them instantly in the original text if you need to review them. Make sure your notes include the following elements:

- Heading summing up the main topic covered
- Author's name, a source code, or an abbreviated source title
- Page number
- Full URL of any pages buried deep in a website

Throughout the process of taking notes, be scrupulous about making sure you have correctly attributed each idea to its source. Always include source information so you know exactly which ideas came from which sources. Use quotation marks to set off any words or phrases taken directly from the original text. If you add your own responses and ideas, make sure they are distinct from ideas you quoted or paraphrased.

Finally, make sure your notes accurately reflect the content of the original text. Make sure quoted material is copied verbatim. If you omit words from a quotation, use ellipses to show the omission and make sure the omission does not change the author's meaning. Paraphrase ideas carefully, and check your paraphrased notes against the original

text to make sure that you have restated the author's ideas accurately in your own words.

Use a System That Works for You

There are several formats you can use to take notes. No technique is necessarily better than the others—it is more important to choose a format you are comfortable using. Choosing the format that works best for you will ensure your notes are organized, complete, and accurate. Consider implementing one of these formats when you begin taking notes:

- **Use index cards.** This traditional format involves writing each note on a separate index card. It takes more time than copying and pasting into an electronic document, which encourages you to be selective in choosing which ideas to record. Recording notes on separate cards makes it easy to later organize your notes according to major topics. Some writers color-code their cards to make them still more organized.
- **Use note-taking software.** Word-processing and office software packages often include different types of note-taking software. Although you may need to set aside some time to learn the software, this method combines the speed of typing with the same degree of organization associated with handwritten note cards.
- **Maintain a research notebook.** Instead of using index cards or electronic note cards, you may wish to keep a notebook or electronic folder, allotting a few pages (or one file) for each of your sources. This method makes it easy to create a separate column or section of the document where you add your responses to the information you encounter in your research.
- **Annotate your sources.** This method involves making handwritten notes in the margins of sources that you have printed or photocopied. If using electronic sources, you can make comments within the source document. For example, you might add comment boxes to a PDF version of an article. This method works best for experienced researchers who have already thought a great deal about the topic because it can be difficult to organize your notes later when starting your draft.

Choose one of the methods from the list to use for taking notes.

Continue gathering sources and taking notes. In the next section, you will learn strategies for organizing and synthesizing the information you have found.

Key Takeaways

- A writer's use of primary and secondary sources is determined by the topic and purpose of the research. Sources used may include print sources, such as books and journals; electronic sources, such as websites and articles retrieved from databases; and human sources of information, such as interviews.
- Strategies that help writers locate sources efficiently include conducting effective keyword searches, understanding how to use online catalogs and databases, using strategies to narrow web search results, and consulting reference librarians.
- Writers evaluate sources based on how relevant they are to the research question and how reliable their content is.
- Skimming sources can help writers determine their relevance efficiently.
- Writers evaluate a source's reliability by asking questions about the type of source (including its audience and purpose); the author's credibility, the publication's reputability, the source's currency, and the overall quality of the writing, research, logic, and design in the source.
- In their notes, effective writers record organized, complete, accurate information. This includes bibliographic information about each source as well as summarized, paraphrased, or quoted information from the source.

This chapter originally appeared in the book *Successful Writing* (v. 1.0). For details on its licensing, view the original work.

Seven Steps of the Research Process

Cornell University Library

Learning Objectives

- Find appropriate information for a college-level research paper.
- Cite sources using standard citation rules.

The following seven steps outline a simple and effective strategy for finding information for a research paper and documenting the sources you find. Depending on your topic and your familiarity with the library, you may need to rearrange or recycle these steps. Adapt this outline to your needs.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR TOPIC

State your topic idea as a question. For example, if you are interested in finding out about use of alcoholic beverages by college students, you might pose the question, “What effect does use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of college students?” Identify the main concepts or keywords in your question. In this case they are alcoholic beverages, health, and college students.

STEP 2: FIND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

After you identify your research topic and some keywords that describe it, find and read articles in subject encyclopedias, dictionaries, and handbooks. These articles will help you understand the context (historical, cultural, disciplinary) of your topic. They are the foundation supporting further research. The most common background sources are subject encyclopedias and dictionaries from our print and online reference collection. Class textbooks also provide definitions of terms and background information.

Look up your keywords in the indexes to subject encyclopedias.

Read articles in these encyclopedias to set the context for your research. Note any relevant items in the bibliographies at the end of the encyclopedia articles. Additional background information may be found in your lecture notes, textbooks, and reserve readings.

TIP: EXPLOIT BIBLIOGRAPHIES

- Read the background information and note any useful sources (books, journals, magazines, etc.) listed in the bibliography at the end of the encyclopedia article or dictionary entry. The sources cited in the bibliography are good starting points for further research.

- Look up these sources in our catalogs and periodical databases. Check the subject headings listed in the subject field of the online record for these books and articles. Then do subject searches using those subject headings to locate additional titles.

- Remember that many of the books and articles you find will themselves have bibliographies. Check these bibliographies for additional useful resources for your research.

By using this technique of routinely following up on sources cited in bibliographies, you can generate a surprisingly large number of books and articles on your topic in a relatively short time.

STEP 3: USE CATALOGS TO FIND BOOKS AND MEDIA

Use guided keyword searching to find materials by topic or subject. Print or write down the citation (author, title, etc.) and the location information (call number and library). Note the circulation status. When you pull the book from the shelf, scan the bibliography for additional sources. Watch for book-length bibliographies and annual reviews on your subject; they list citations to hundreds of books and articles in one subject area.

STEP 4: USE INDEXES TO FIND PERIODICAL ARTICLES

Use periodical indexes and abstracts to find citations to articles. The indexes and abstracts may be in print or computer-based formats or both. Choose the indexes and format best suited to your particular topic; ask at the reference desk of your library if you need help figuring out which index and format will be best.

You can find periodical articles by the article author, title, or

keyword by using periodical indexes. If the full text is not linked in the index you are using, write down the citation from the index and search for the title of the periodical in your library's catalog.

STEP 5: FIND INTERNET RESOURCES

Use search engines. Check to see if your class has a bibliography or research guide created by librarians. Some search tools include:

- Search Engines – Comparison table of recommended search engines; how search engines work
- Subject Directories – Table comparing some of the best human-selected collections of web pages
- Meta-Search Engines – Use at your own risk: not recommended as a substitute for directly using search engines
- Invisible Web – What it is, how to find it, and its inherent ambiguity (searchable databases on the Web).

STEP 6: EVALUATE WHAT YOU FIND

CRITICALLY ANALYZING INFORMATION SOURCES: INITIAL APPRAISAL

Author

- What are the author's credentials—institutional affiliation (where he or she works), educational background, past writings, or experience? Is the book or article written on a topic in the author's area of expertise? You can use the various Who's Who publications for the U.S. and other countries and for specific subjects and the biographical information located in the publication itself to help determine the author's affiliation and credentials.
- Has your instructor mentioned this author? Have you seen the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies? Respected authors are cited frequently by other scholars. For this reason, always note those names that appear in many different sources.
- Is the author associated with a reputable institution or organization? What are the basic values or goals of the organization or institution?

Date of Publication

- When was the source published? This date is often located

on the face of the title page below the name of the publisher. If it is not there, look for the copyright date on the reverse of the title page. On Web pages, the date of the last revision is usually at the bottom of the home page, sometimes every page.

- Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? Topic areas of continuing and rapid development, such as the sciences, demand more current information. On the other hand, topics in the humanities often require material that was written many years ago. At the other extreme, some news sources on the Web now note the hour and minute that articles are posted on their site.

Edition or Revision

- Is this a first edition of this publication or not? Further editions indicate a source has been revised and updated to reflect changes in knowledge, include omissions, and harmonize with its intended reader's needs. Also, many printings or editions may indicate that the work has become a standard source in the area and is reliable. If you are using a Web source, do the pages indicate revision dates?

Publisher

- Note the publisher. If the source is published by a university press, it is likely to be scholarly. Although the fact that the publisher is reputable does not necessarily guarantee quality, it does show that the publisher may have high regard for the source being published.

Title of Journal

- Is this a scholarly or a popular journal? This distinction is important because it indicates different levels of complexity in conveying ideas. If you need help in determining the type of journal, see *Distinguishing Scholarly from Non-Scholarly Periodicals*. Or you may wish to check your journal title in the latest edition of *Katz's Magazines for Libraries* (Olin Ref Z 6941 .K21, shelved at the reference desk) for a brief evaluative description.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT: CONTENT ANALYSIS

Having made an initial appraisal, you should now examine the body of the source. Read the preface to determine the author's intentions for the

book. Scan the table of contents and the index to get a broad overview of the material it covers. Note whether bibliographies are included. Read the chapters that specifically address your topic. Reading the article abstract and scanning the table of contents of a journal or magazine issue is also useful. As with books, the presence and quality of a bibliography at the end of the article may reflect the care with which the authors have prepared their work.

Intended Audience

What type of audience is the author addressing? Is the publication aimed at a specialized or a general audience? Is this source too elementary, too technical, too advanced, or just right for your needs?

Objective Reasoning

- Is the information covered fact, opinion, or propaganda? It is not always easy to separate fact from opinion. Facts can usually be verified; opinions, though they may be based on factual information, evolve from the interpretation of facts. Skilled writers can make you think their interpretations are facts.
- Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it questionable and unsupported by evidence? Assumptions should be reasonable. Note errors or omissions.
- Are the ideas and arguments advanced more or less in line with other works you have read on the same topic? The more radically an author departs from the views of others in the same field, the more carefully and critically you should scrutinize his or her ideas.
- Is the author's point of view objective and impartial? Is the language free of emotion-arousing words and bias?

Coverage

- Does the work update other sources, substantiate other materials you have read, or add new information? Does it extensively or marginally cover your topic? You should explore enough sources to obtain a variety of viewpoints.
- Is the material primary or secondary in nature? Primary sources are the raw material of the research process. Secondary sources are based on primary sources.
 - For example, if you were researching Konrad Adenauer's role in rebuilding West Germany after

World War II, Adenauer's own writings would be one of many primary sources available on this topic. Others might include relevant government documents and contemporary German newspaper articles. Scholars use this primary material to help generate historical interpretations—a secondary source. Books, encyclopedia articles, and scholarly journal articles about Adenauer's role are considered secondary sources. In the sciences, journal articles and conference proceedings written by experimenters reporting the results of their research are primary documents. Choose both primary and secondary sources when you have the opportunity.

Writing Style

Is the publication organized logically? Are the main points clearly presented? Do you find the text easy to read, or is it stilted or choppy? Is the author's argument repetitive?

Evaluative Reviews

- Locate critical reviews of books in a reviewing source, such as Summon's Advanced Search, Book Review Index, Book Review Digest, and ProQuest Research Library. Is the review positive? Is the book under review considered a valuable contribution to the field? Does the reviewer mention other books that might be better? If so, locate these sources for more information on your topic.
- Do the various reviewers agree on the value or attributes of the book or has it aroused controversy among the critics?
- For Web sites, consider consulting one of the evaluation and reviewing sources on the Internet.

Examples in Video:

- Many excellent video resources exist that describe the process of research. Here are three videos from Cornell's "Research Minutes" series, which provide videos under 3 minutes, that you may find useful:

- How to Read Citations: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1yNDvmjqaE>
- How to Identify Scholarly Journal Articles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDGJ2CYfY9A>
- How to Identify Substantive News Articles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAiJL5B5esM>

STEP 7: CITE WHAT YOU FIND USING A STANDARD FORMAT

Give credit where credit is due; cite your sources.

Citing or documenting the sources used in your research serves two purposes, it gives proper credit to the authors of the materials used, and it allows those who are reading your work to duplicate your research and locate the sources that you have listed as references. Knowingly representing the work of others as your own is plagiarism. Use one of the styles listed below or another style approved by your instructor.

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION (MLA)

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 8th ed. New York: MLA, 2016.

This handbook is intended as an aid for college students writing research papers. Included here is information on selecting a topic, researching the topic, note taking, the writing of footnotes and bibliographies, as well as sample pages of a research paper. Useful for the beginning researcher.

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (APA)

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. 6th ed. Washington: APA, 2010

The authoritative style manual for anyone writing in the field of psychology. Useful for the social sciences generally. Chapters discuss the content and organization of a manuscript, writing style, the American Psychological Association citation style, and typing, mailing and proofreading.

RESEARCH TIPS

- Work from the general to the specific. Find background information first, then use more specific and recent sources.
- Record what you find and where you found it. Record the complete citation for each source you find; you may need it again later.
- Translate your topic into the subject language of the indexes and catalogs you use. Check your topic words against a thesaurus or subject heading list.

This chapter was originally published by Lumen Learning and combines the Seven Steps of the Research Process guide from Cornell University and Finding Information on the Internet: A Tutorial by the University of California at Berkeley. All content is CC-BY-NC-SA except for the cited videos above.

Part 4: Rhetorical Modes

Though there are as many ways to write a paper as there are papers, it is helpful to categorize different types of writing under specific names or genres. This section defines the most commonly used types (called modes) of writing that you may encounter in college and beyond. Each describes the way the piece is written, so that you can choose this form as a writer or identify it quickly as a reader. Knowing each mode helps organize thinking and writing to make concentrating on content a swifter, more instinctive process.

Narrative

Writing for Success

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose and structure of narrative writing.
- Understand how to write a narrative essay.

THE PURPOSE OF NARRATIVE WRITING

Narration means the art of storytelling, and the purpose of narrative writing is to tell stories. Any time you tell a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident in your day, you engage in a form of narration. In addition, a narrative can be factual or fictional. A factual story is one that is based on, and tries to be faithful to, actual events as they unfolded in real life. A fictional story is a made-up, or imagined, story; the writer of a fictional story can create characters and events as he or she sees fit.

The big distinction between factual and fictional narratives is based on a writer's purpose. The writers of factual stories try to recount events as they actually happened, but writers of fictional stories can depart from real people and events because the writers' intents are not to retell a real-life event. Biographies and memoirs are examples of factual stories, whereas novels and short stories are examples of fictional stories.

TIP

Because the line between fact and fiction can often blur, it is helpful to understand what your purpose is from the beginning. Is it important that you recount history, either your own or someone else's? Or does your interest lie in reshaping the world in your own image—either how you would like to see it or how you imagine it

could be? Your answers will go a long way in shaping the stories you tell.

Ultimately, whether the story is fact or fiction, narrative writing tries to relay a series of events in an emotionally engaging way. You want your audience to be moved by your story, which could mean through laughter, sympathy, fear, anger, and so on. The more clearly you tell your story, the more emotionally engaged your audience is likely to be.

Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, start brainstorming ideas for a narrative. First, decide whether you want to write a factual or fictional story. Then, freewrite for five minutes. Be sure to use all five minutes, and keep writing the entire time. Do not stop and think about what to write.

The following are some topics to consider as you get going:

- Childhood
- School
- Adventure
- Work
- Love
- Family
- Friends
- Vacation
- Nature
- Space

THE STRUCTURE OF A NARRATIVE ESSAY

Major narrative events are most often conveyed in chronological order, the order in which events unfold from first to last. Stories typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and these events are typically organized by time. Certain transitional words and phrases aid in keeping the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story. Some of these phrases are listed in Table 10.1 “Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time”.

Table 10.1 Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time

after/afterward	as soon as	at last	before
currently	during	eventually	meanwhile
next	now	since	soon
finally	later	still	then
until	when/whenever	while	first, second, third

The following are the other basic components of a narrative:

- **Plot.** The events as they unfold in sequence.
- **Characters.** The people who inhabit the story and move it forward. Typically, there are minor characters and main characters. The minor characters generally play supporting roles to the main character, or the protagonist.
- **Conflict.** The primary problem or obstacle that unfolds in the plot that the protagonist must solve or overcome by the end of the narrative. The way in which the protagonist resolves the conflict of the plot results in the theme of the narrative.
- **Theme.** The ultimate message the narrative is trying to express; it can be either explicit or implicit.

WRITING AT WORK

When interviewing candidates for jobs, employers often ask about conflicts or problems a potential employee has had to overcome. They are asking for a compelling personal narrative. To prepare for this question in a job interview, write out a scenario using the narrative mode structure. This will allow you to troubleshoot rough spots, as well as better understand your own personal history. Both processes will make your story better and your self-presentation better, too.

Exercise 2

Take your freewriting exercise from the last section and start crafting it chronologically into a rough plot summary. To read

more about a summary, see Chapter 6 “Writing Paragraphs: Separating Ideas and Shaping Content”. Be sure to use the time transition words and phrases listed in Table 10.1 “Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time” to sequence the events.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your rough plot summary.

WRITING A NARRATIVE ESSAY

When writing a narrative essay, start by asking yourself if you want to write a factual or fictional story. Then freewrite about topics that are of general interest to you.

Once you have a general idea of what you will be writing about, you should sketch out the major events of the story that will compose your plot. Typically, these events will be revealed chronologically and climax at a central conflict that must be resolved by the end of the story. The use of strong details is crucial as you describe the events and characters in your narrative. You want the reader to emotionally engage with the world that you create in writing.

TIP

To create strong details, keep the human senses in mind. You want your reader to be immersed in the world that you create, so focus on details related to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch as you describe people, places, and events in your narrative.

As always, it is important to start with a strong introduction to hook your reader into wanting to read more. Try opening the essay with an event that is interesting to introduce the story and get it going. Finally, your conclusion should help resolve the central conflict of the story and impress upon your reader the ultimate theme of the piece.

Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, add two or three paragraphs to the

plot summary you started in the last section. Describe in detail the main character and the setting of the first scene. Try to use all five senses in your descriptions.

Key Takeaways

- Narration is the art of storytelling.
- Narratives can be either factual or fictional. In either case, narratives should emotionally engage the reader.
- Most narratives are composed of major events sequenced in chronological order.
- Time transition words and phrases are used to orient the reader in the sequence of a narrative.
- The four basic components to all narratives are plot, character, conflict, and theme.
- The use of sensory details is crucial to emotionally engaging the reader.
- A strong introduction is important to hook the reader. A strong conclusion should add resolution to the conflict and evoke the narrative's theme.

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Description

Writing for Success

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose and structure of the description essay.
- Understand how to write a description essay.

THE PURPOSE OF DESCRIPTION IN WRITING

Writers use description in writing to make sure that their audience is fully immersed in the words on the page. This requires a concerted effort by the writer to describe his or her world through the use of sensory details.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, sensory details are descriptions that appeal to our sense of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Your descriptions should try to focus on the five senses because we all rely on these senses to experience the world. The use of sensory details, then, provides you the greatest possibility of relating to your audience and thus engaging them in your writing, making descriptive writing important not only during your education but also during everyday situations.

TIP

Avoid empty descriptors if possible. Empty descriptors are adjectives that can mean different things to different people. Good, beautiful, terrific, and nice are examples. The use of such words in descriptions can lead to misreads and confusion. A good day, for instance, can mean far different things depending on one's age, personality, or tastes.

WRITING AT WORK

Whether you are presenting a new product or service to a client, training new employees, or brainstorming ideas with colleagues, the use of clear, evocative detail is crucial. Make an effort to use details that express your thoughts in a way that will register with others. Sharp, concise details are always impressive.

Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, describe the following five items in a short paragraph. Use at least three of the five senses for each description.

- Night
- Beach
- City
- Dinner
- Stranger

THE STRUCTURE OF A DESCRIPTION ESSAY

Description essays typically describe a person, a place, or an object using sensory details. The structure of a descriptive essay is more flexible than in some of the other rhetorical modes. The introduction of a description essay should set up the tone and point of the essay. The thesis should convey the writer's overall impression of the person, place, or object described in the body paragraphs.

The organization of the essay may best follow spatial order, an arrangement of ideas according to physical characteristics or appearance. Depending on what the writer describes, the organization could move from top to bottom, left to right, near to far, warm to cold, frightening to inviting, and so on.

For example, if the subject were a client's kitchen in the midst of renovation, you might start at one side of the room and move slowly across to the other end, describing appliances, cabinetry, and so on. Or you might choose to start with older remnants of the kitchen and progress to the new installations. Maybe start with the floor and move up toward the ceiling.

Exercise 2

On a separate sheet of paper, choose an organizing strategy and then execute it in a short paragraph for three of the following six items:

- Train station
- Your office
- Your car
- A coffee shop
- Lobby of a movie theater
- Mystery Option
 - Choose an object to describe but do not indicate it. Describe it, but preserve the mystery.

WRITING A DESCRIPTION ESSAY

Choosing a subject is the first step in writing a description essay. Once you have chosen the person, place, or object you want to describe, your challenge is to write an effective thesis statement to guide your essay.

The remainder of your essay describes your subject in a way that best expresses your thesis. Remember, you should have a strong sense of how you will organize your essay. Choose a strategy and stick to it.

Every part of your essay should use vivid sensory details. The more you can appeal to your readers' senses, the more they will be engaged in your essay.

Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, choose one of the topics that you started in Exercise 2, and expand it into a five-paragraph essay. Expanding on ideas in greater detail can be difficult. Sometimes it is helpful to look closely at each of the sentences in a summary paragraph. Those sentences can often serve as topic sentences to larger paragraphs.

Mystery Option: Here is an opportunity to collaborate. Please

share with a classmate and compare your thoughts on the mystery descriptions. Did your classmate correctly guess your mystery topic? If not, how could you provide more detail to describe it and lead them to the correct conclusion?

Key Takeaways

- Description essays should describe something vividly to the reader using strong sensory details.
- Sensory details appeal to the five human senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.
- A description essay should start with the writer's main impression of a person, a place, or an object.
- Use spatial order to organize your descriptive writing.

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Research Writing and Argument: All Writing is Argument

Pavel Zemilansky

Learning Objectives

- Define rhetoric and explain the term's historical context related to persuasive writing
- Demonstrate the importance of research writing as a rhetorical, persuasive activity

This chapter is about rhetoric—the art of persuasion. Every time we write, we engage in argument. Through writing, we try to persuade and influence our readers, either directly or indirectly. We work to get them to change their minds, to do something, or to begin thinking in new ways. Therefore, every writer needs to know and be able to use principles of rhetoric. The first step towards such knowledge is learning to see the argumentative nature of all writing.

I have two goals in this chapter: to explain the term rhetoric and to give you some historical perspective on its origins and development; and to demonstrate the importance of seeing research writing as a rhetorical, persuasive activity.

As consumers of written texts, we are often tempted to divide writing into two categories: argumentative and non-argumentative. According to this view, in order to be argumentative, writing must have the following qualities. It has to defend a position in a debate between two or more opposing sides; it must be on a controversial topic; and the goal of such writing must be to prove the correctness of one point of view over another.

On the other hand, this view goes, non-argumentative texts include narratives, descriptions, technical reports, news stories, and so on. When deciding to which category a given piece of writing belongs, we sometimes look for familiar traits of argument, such as the presence of a thesis statement, of “factual” evidence, and so on.

Research writing is often categorized as “non-argumentative.” This happens because of the way in which we learn about research writing. Most of us do that through the traditional research report, the kind which focuses too much on information-gathering and note cards and not enough on constructing engaging and interesting points of view for real audiences. It is the gathering and compiling of information, and not doing something productive and interesting with this information, that become the primary goals of this writing exercise. Generic research papers are also often evaluated on the quantity and accuracy of external information that they gather, rather on the persuasive impact they make and the interest they generate among readers.

Having written countless research reports, we begin to suspect that all research-based writing is non-argumentative. Even when explicitly asked to construct a thesis statement and support it through researched evidence, beginning writers are likely to pay more attention to such mechanics of research as finding the assigned number and kind of sources and documenting them correctly, than to constructing an argument capable of making an impact on the reader.

ARGUMENTS AREN'T VERBAL FIGHTS

We often have narrow concept of the word “argument.” In everyday life, argument often implies a confrontation, a clash of opinions and personalities, or just a plain verbal fight. It implies a winner and a loser, a right side and a wrong one. Because of this understanding of the word “argument,” the only kind of writing seen as argumentative is the debate-like “position” paper, in which the author defends his or her point of view against other, usually opposing points of view.

Such an understanding of argument is narrow because arguments come in all shapes and sizes. I invite you to look at the term “argument” in a new way. What if we think of “argument” as an opportunity for conversation, for sharing with others our point of view on something, for showing others our perspective of the world? What if we see it as the opportunity to tell our stories, including our life stories? What if we think of “argument” as an opportunity to connect with the points of view of others rather than defeating those points of view?

Some years ago, I heard a conference speaker define argument as the opposite of “beating your audience into rhetorical submission.” I still like that definition because it implies gradual and even gentle explanation and persuasion instead of coercion. It implies effective

use of details, and stories, including emotional ones. It implies the understanding of argument as an explanation of one's world view.

Arguments then, can be explicit and implicit, or implied. Explicit arguments contain noticeable and definable thesis statements and lots of specific proofs. Implicit arguments, on the other hand, work by weaving together facts and narratives, logic and emotion, personal experiences and statistics. Unlike explicit arguments, implicit ones do not have a one-sentence thesis statement. Instead, authors of implicit arguments use evidence of many different kinds in effective and creative ways to build and convey their point of view to their audience. Research is essential for creative effective arguments of both kinds.

To consider the many types and facets of written argumentation, consider the following exploration activity.

WRITING ACTIVITY: ANALYZING WRITING SITUATIONS

Working individually or in small groups, consider the following writing situations. Are these situations opportunities for argumentative writing? If so, what elements of argument do you see? Use your experience as a reader and imagine the kinds of published texts that might result from these writing situations. Apply the ideas about argument mentioned so far in this chapter, including the “explicit” and “implicit” arguments

- A group of scientists develops a hypothesis and conducts a series of experiments to test it. After obtaining the results from those experiments, they decide to publish their findings in a scientific journal. However, the data can be interpreted in two ways. The authors can use a long-standing theory with which most of his colleagues agree. But they can also use a newer and more ambitious theory on which there is no consensus in the field, but which our authors believe to be more comprehensive and up-to-date. Using different theories will produce different interpretations of the data and different pieces of writing. Are both resulting texts arguments? Why or why not?

- An author wants to write a memoir. She is particularly interested in her relationship with her parents as a teenager. In order to focus on that period of her life, she decides to omit other events and time periods from the memoir. The finished text is a combination of stories, reflections, and facts. This text does not have a clear thesis statement or proofs. Could this “selective” memory” writing be called an argument? What are the reasons for your decision?

- A travel writer who is worried about global warming goes to Antarctica and observes the melting of the ice there. Using her

observations, interviews with scientists, and secondary research, she then prepares an article about her trip for *The National Geographic* magazine or a similar publication. Her piece does not contain a one-sentence thesis statement or a direct call to fight global warming. At the same time, her evidence suggests that ice in the Arctic melts faster than it used to. Does this writer engage in argument? Why or why not? What factors influenced your decision?

- A novelist writes a book based on the events of the American Civil War. He recreates historical characters from archival research, but adds details, descriptions, and other characters to his book that are not necessarily historic. The resulting novel is in the genre known as “historical fiction.” Like all works of fiction, the book does not have a thesis statement or explicit proofs. It does, however, promote a certain view of history, some of which is based on the author’s research and some—on his imagination and creative license. Is this a representation of history, an argument, or a combination of both? Why or why not?

You can probably think of many more examples when argument in writing is expressed through means other than the traditional thesis statement and proofs. As you work through this book, continue to think about the nature of argument in writing and discuss it with your classmates and your instructor.

DEFINITIONS OF RHETORIC AND THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

The art of creating effective arguments is explained and systematized by a discipline called rhetoric. Writing is about making choices, and knowing the principles of rhetoric allows a writer to make informed choices about various aspects of the writing process. Every act of writing takes place in a specific rhetorical situation. The three most basic and important components of a rhetorical situations are:

- Purpose of writing
- Intended audience,
- Occasion, or context in which the text will be written and read

These factors help writers select their topics, arrange their material, and make other important decisions about their work.

Before looking closely at different definitions and components of rhetoric, let us try to understand what rhetoric is not. In recent years, the word “rhetoric” has developed a bad reputation in American popular culture. In the popular mind, the term “rhetoric” has come to

mean something negative and deceptive. Open a newspaper or turn on the television, and you are likely to hear politicians accusing each other of “too much rhetoric and not enough substance.” According to this distorted view, rhetoric is verbal fluff, used to disguise empty or even deceitful arguments.

Examples of this misuse abound. Here are some examples.

A 2003 CNN news article “North Korea Talks On Despite Rhetoric” describes the decision by the international community to continue the talks with North Korea about its nuclear arms program despite what the author sees as North Koreans’ “rhetorical blast” at a US official taking part in the talks. The implication here is that that, by verbally attacking the US official, the North Koreans attempted to hide the lack of substance in their argument. The word “rhetoric” in this context implies a strategy to deceive or distract.

Another example is the title of the now-defunct political website “Spinsanity: Countering Rhetoric with Reason.” The website’s authors state that “engaged citizenry, active press and strong network of fact-checking websites and blogs can help turn the tide of deception that we now see.” (<http://www.spinsanity.org>). What this statement implies, of course, is that rhetoric is “spin” and that it is the opposite of truth.

Rhetoric is not a dirty trick used by politicians to conceal and obscure, but an art, which, for many centuries, has had many definitions. Perhaps the most popular and overreaching definition comes to us from the Ancient Greek thinker Aristotle. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Ch.2). Aristotle saw primarily as a practical tool, indispensable for civic discourse.

ELEMENTS OF THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

When composing, every writer must take into account the conditions under which the writing is produced and will be read. It is customary to represent the three key elements of the rhetorical situation as a triangle of writer, reader, and text, or, as “communicator,” “audience,” and “message.”

The three elements of the rhetorical situation are in a constant and dynamic interrelation. All three are also necessary for communication through writing to take place. For example, if the writer is taken out of this equation, the text will not be created. Similarly, eliminating the text itself will leave us with the reader and writer, but without any means of conveying ideas between them, and so on.

Moreover, changing on or more characteristics of any of the

elements depicted in the figure above will change the other elements as well. For example, with the change in the beliefs and values of the audience, the message will also likely change to accommodate those new beliefs, and so on.

In his discussion of rhetoric, Aristotle states that writing's primary purpose is persuasion. Other ancient rhetoricians' theories expand the scope of rhetoric by adding new definitions, purposes, and methods. For example, another Greek philosopher and rhetorician Plato saw rhetoric as a means of discovering the truth, including personal truth, through dialog and discussion. According to Plato, rhetoric can be directed outward (at readers or listeners), or inward (at the writer him or herself). In the latter case, the purpose of rhetoric is to help the author discover something important about his or her own experience and life.

The third major rhetorical school of Ancient Greece whose views have profoundly influenced our understanding of rhetoric were the Sophists. The Sophists were teachers of rhetoric for hire. The primary goal of their activities was to teach skills and strategies for effective speaking and writing. Many Sophists claimed that they could make anyone into an effective rhetorician. In their most extreme variety, Sophistic rhetoric claims that virtually anything could be proven if the rhetorician has the right skills. The legacy of Sophistic rhetoric is controversial. Some scholars, including Plato himself, have accused the Sophists of bending ethical standards in order to achieve their goals, while others have praised them for promoting democracy and civic participation through argumentative discourse.

What do these various definitions of rhetoric have to do with research writing? Everything! If you have ever had trouble with a writing assignment, chances are it was because you could not figure out the assignment's purpose. Or, perhaps you did not understand very well whom your writing was supposed to appeal to. It is hard to commit to purposeless writing done for no one in particular.

Research is not a very useful activity if it is done for its own sake. If you think of a situation in your own life where you had to do any kind of research, you probably had a purpose that the research helped you to accomplish. You could, for example, have been considering buying a car and wanted to know which make and model would suite you best. Or, you could have been looking for an apartment to rent and wanted to get the best deal for your money. Or, perhaps your family was planning a vacation and researched the best deals on hotels, airfares, and rental cars. Even

in these simple examples of research that are far simpler than research most writers conduct, you as a researcher were guided by some overriding purpose. You researched because you had a purpose to accomplish.

HOW TO APPROACH WRITING TASKS RHETORICALLY

The three main elements of rhetorical theory are purpose, audience, and occasion. We will look at these elements primarily through the lens of Classical Rhetoric, the rhetoric of Ancient Greece and Rome. Principles of classical rhetoric (albeit some of them modified) are widely accepted across the modern Western civilization. Classical rhetoric provides a solid framework for analysis and production of effective texts in a variety of situations.

PURPOSE

Good writing always serves a purpose. Texts are created to persuade, entertain, inform, instruct, and so on. In a real writing situation, these discrete purposes are often combined.

Writing Activity: Analyzing Purpose

Recall any text you wrote, in or outside of school. Think not only of school papers, but also of letters to relatives and friends, e-mails, shopping lists, online postings, and so on. Consider the following questions.

- Was the purpose of the writing well defined for you in the assignment, or did you have to define it yourself?
- What did you have to do in order to understand or create your purpose?
- Did you have trouble articulating and fulfilling your writing purpose?

Be sure to record your answers and share them with your classmates and/or instructor.

AUDIENCE

The second key element of the rhetorical approach to writing is audience-awareness. As you saw from the rhetorical triangle earlier in

this chapter, readers are an indispensable part of the rhetorical equation, and it is essential for every writer to understand their audience and tailor his or her message to the audience's needs.

The key principles that every writer needs to follow in order to reach and affect his or her audience are as follows:

- Have a clear idea about who your readers will be.
- Understand your readers' previous experiences, knowledge, biases, and expectations and how these factors can influence their reception of your argument.
- When writing, keep in mind not only those readers who are physically present or whom you know (your classmates and instructor), but all readers who would benefit from or be influenced by your argument.
- Choose a style, tone, and medium of presentation appropriate for your intended audience.

Writing Activity: Analyzing Audience

Every writer needs to consider his or her audience carefully when writing. Otherwise, your writing will be directed at no one in particular. As a result, your purpose will become unclear and your work will lose its effectiveness.

Consider any recent writing task that you faced. As with all the exploration activities included in this chapter, do not limit yourself to school writing assignments. Include letters, e-mails, notes, and any other kinds of writing you may do.

- Did you have a clearly defined audience?
- If not, what measures did you take to define and understand your audience?
- How did you know who your readers were?
- Did your writing purpose fit what your intended audience needed or wanted to hear?
- What were the best ways to appeal to your audience (both logical and emotional)?
- How did your decision to use or not to use external research influence the reception of your argument by your audience?

OCCASION

Occasion is an important part of the rhetorical situation. It is a part of the writing context that was mentioned earlier in the chapter. Writers do not work in a vacuum. Instead, the content, form and reception of their work by readers are heavily influenced by the conditions in society as well as by personal situations of their readers. These conditions in which texts are created and read affect every aspect of writing and every stage of the writing process, from topic selection, to decisions about what kinds of arguments used and their arrangement, to the writing style, voice, and persona which the writer wishes to project in his or her writing. All elements of the rhetorical situation work together in a dynamic relationship. Therefore, awareness of rhetorical occasion and other elements of the context of your writing will also help you refine your purpose and understand your audience better. Similarly having a clear purpose in mind when writing and knowing your audience will help you understand the context in which you are writing and in which your work will be read better.

One aspect of writing where you can immediately benefit from understanding occasion and using it to your rhetorical advantage is the selection of topics for your compositions. Any topic can be good or bad, and a key factor in deciding on whether it fits the occasion. In order to understand whether a particular topic is suitable for a composition, it is useful to analyze whether the composition would address an issue, or a rhetorical exigency when created. The writing activity below can help you select topics and issues for written arguments.

Writing Activity: Analyzing Rhetorical Exigency

- If you are considering a topic for a paper, think whether the paper would address a specific problem or issue. In other words, will it address a real exigency, something that needs to be solved or discussed?
- Who are the people with interests and stakes in the problem?
- What are your limitations? Can you hope to solve the problem once and for all, or should your goals be more modest? Why or why not?

Share your results with your classmates and instructor.

To understand how writers can study and use occasion in order to make effective arguments, let us examine another ancient rhetorical concept. Kairos is one of the most fascinating terms from Classical rhetoric. It signifies the right, or opportune moment for an argument to be made. It is such a moment or time when the subject of the argument is particularly urgent or important and when audiences are more likely to be persuaded by it. Ancient rhetoricians believed that if the moment for the argument is right, for instance if there are conditions in society which would make the audience more receptive to the argument, the rhetorician would have more success persuading such an audience.

For example, as I write this text, a heated debate about the war on terrorism and about the goals and methods of this war is going on in the US. It is also the year of the Presidential Election, and political candidates try to use the war on terrorism to their advantage when they debate each other. These are topics of high public interest, with print media, television, radio, and the Internet constantly discussing them. Because there is an enormous public interest in the topic of terrorism, well-written articles and reports on the subject will not fall on deaf ears. Simply put, the moment, or occasion, for the debate is right, and it will continue until public interest in the subject weakens or disappears.

RHETORICAL APPEALS

In order to persuade their readers, writers must use three types of proofs or rhetorical appeals. They are logos, or logical appeal; pathos, or emotional appeal; and ethos, or ethical appeal, or appeal based on the character and credibility of the author. It is easy to notice that modern words “logical,” “pathetic,” and “ethical” are derived from those Greek words. In his work *Rhetoric*, Aristotle writes that the three appeals must be used together in every piece of persuasive discourse. An argument based on the appeal to logic, or emotions alone will not be an effective one.

Understanding how logos, pathos, and ethos should work together is very important for writers who use research. Often, research writing assignments are written in a way that seems to emphasize logical proofs over emotional or ethical ones. Such logical proofs in research papers typically consist of factual information, statistics, examples, and other similar evidence. According to this view, writers of academic papers need to be unbiased and objective, and using logical proofs will help them to be that way.

Because of this emphasis on logical proofs, you may be less familiar

with the kinds of pathetic and ethical proofs available to you. Pathetic appeals, or appeals to emotions of the audience were considered by ancient rhetoricians as important as logical proofs. Yet, writers are sometimes not easily convinced to use pathetic appeals in their writing. As modern rhetoricians and authors of the influential book *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (1998), Edward P.J. Corbett and Robert Connors said, “People are rather sheepish about acknowledging that their opinions can be affected by their emotions” (86). According to Corbett, many of us think that there may be something wrong about using emotions in argument. But, I agree with Corbett and Connors, pathetic proofs are not only admissible in argument, but necessary (86–89). The most basic way of evoking appropriate emotional responses in your audience, according to Corbett, is the use of vivid descriptions (94).

Using ethical appeals, or appeals based on the character of the writer, involves establishing and maintaining your credibility in the eyes of your readers. In other words, when writing, think about how you are presenting yourself to your audience. Do you give your readers enough reasons to trust you and your argument, or do you give them reasons to doubt your authority and your credibility? Consider all the times when your decision about the merits of a given argument was affected by the person or people making the argument. For example, when watching television news, are you predisposed against certain cable networks and more inclined towards others because you trust them more?

So, how can a writer establish a credible persona for his or her audience? One way to do that is through external research. Conducting research and using it well in your writing help with you with the factual proofs (logos), but it also shows your readers that you, as the author, have done your homework and know what you are talking about. This knowledge, the sense of your authority that this creates among your readers, will help you be a more effective writer.

The logical, pathetic, and ethical appeals work in a dynamic combination with one another. It is sometimes hard to separate one kind of proof from another and the methods by which the writer achieved the desired rhetorical effect. If your research contains data which is likely to cause your readers to be emotional, it data can enhance the pathetic aspect of your argument. The key to using the three appeals, is to use them in combination with each other, and in moderation. It is impossible to construct a successful argument by relying too much on one or two appeals while neglecting the others.

RESEARCH WRITING AS CONVERSATION

Writing is a social process. Texts are created to be read by others, and in creating those texts, writers should be aware of not only their personal assumptions, biases, and tastes, but also those of their readers. Writing, therefore, is an interactive process. It is a conversation, a meeting of minds, during which ideas are exchanged, debates and discussions take place and, sometimes, but not always, consensus is reached. You may be familiar with the famous quote by the 20th century rhetorician Kenneth Burke who compared writing to a conversation at a social event. In his 1974 book *The Philosophy of Literary Form* Burke writes,

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him, another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment of gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress (110-111).

This passage by Burke is extremely popular among writers because it captures the interactive nature of writing so precisely. Reading Burke's words carefully, we will notice that the interaction between readers and writers is continuous. A writer always enters a conversation in progress. In order to participate in the discussion, just like in real life, you need to know what your interlocutors have been talking about. So you listen (read). Once you feel you have got the drift of the conversation, you say (write) something. Your text is read by others who respond to your ideas, stories, and arguments with their own. This interaction never ends!

To write well, it is important to listen carefully and understand the conversations that are going on around you. Writers who are able to listen to these conversations and pick up important topics, themes, and arguments are generally more effective at reaching and impressing their audiences. It is also important to treat research, writing, and every occasion for these activities as opportunities to participate in

the on-going conversation of people interested in the same topics and questions which interest you.

Our knowledge about our world is shaped by the best and most up-to-date theories available to them. Sometimes these theories can be experimentally tested and proven, and sometimes, when obtaining such proof is impossible, they are based on consensus reached as a result of conversation and debate. Even the theories and knowledge that can be experimentally tested (for example in sciences) do not become accepted knowledge until most members of the scientific community accept them. Other members of this community will help them test their theories and hypotheses, give them feedback on their writing, and keep them searching for the best answers to their questions. As Burke says in his famous passage, the interaction between the members of intellectual communities never ends. No piece of writing, no argument, no theory or discover is ever final. Instead, they all are subject to discussion, questioning, and improvement.

A simple but useful example of this process is the evolution of humankind's understanding of their planet Earth and its place in the Universe. As you know, in Medieval Europe, the prevailing theory was that the Earth was the center of the Universe and that all other planets and the Sun rotated around it. This theory was the result of the church's teachings, and thinkers who disagreed with it were pronounced heretics and often burned. In 1543, astronomer Nikolaus Kopernikus argued that the Sun was at the center of the solar system and that all planets of the system rotate around the Sun. Later, Galileo experimentally proved Kopernikus' theory with the help of a telescope. Of course, the Earth did not begin to rotate around the Sun with this discovery. Yet, Kopernikus' and Galileo's theories of the Universe went against the Catholic Church's teachings which dominated the social discourse of Medieval Europe. The Inquisition did not engage in debate with the two scientists. Instead, Kopernikus was executed for his views and Galileo was sentenced to house arrest for his views.

Although in the modern world, dissenting thinkers are unlikely to suffer such harsh punishment, the examples of Kopernikus and Galileo teach us two valuable lessons about the social nature of knowledge. Firstly, Both Kopernikus and Galileo tried to improve on an existing theory of the Universe that placed our planet at the center. They did not work from nothing but used beliefs that already existed in their society and tried to modify and disprove those beliefs. Time and later scientific research proved that they were right. Secondly, even after Galileo was able to prove the structure of the Solar system

experimentally, his theory did not become widely accepted until the majority of people in society assimilated it. Therefore, new findings do not become accepted knowledge until they penetrate the fabric of social discourse and until enough people accept them as true.

Writing Activity: Finding the Origins of Knowledge

- Seeing writing as an exchange of ideas means seeing all new theories, ideas, and beliefs as grounded in pre-existing knowledge. Therefore, when beginning a new writing project, writers never work “from scratch.” Instead, they tap into the resources of their community for ideas, inspiration, and research leads. Keeping these statements in mind, answer the following questions. Apply your answers to one of the research projects described in this book. Be sure to record your answers.
- Consider a possible research project topic. What do you know about your topic before you begin to write?
- Where did this knowledge come from? Be sure to include both secondary sources (books, websites, etc.) and primary ones (people, events, personal memories). Is this knowledge socially created? What communities or groups or people created it, how, and why?
- What parts of your current knowledge about your subject could be called “fact” and what parts could be called “opinion?”
- How can your current knowledge about the topic help you in planning and conducting the research for the project?

Share your thoughts with your classmates and instructor.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have learned the definition of rhetoric and the basic differences between several important rhetorical schools. We have also discussed how to key elements of the rhetorical situation: purpose, audience, and context. As you work on the research writing projects presented throughout this book, be sure to revisit this chapter often. Everything that you have read about here and every activity you have completed as you worked through this chapter is applicable to all

research writing projects in this book and beyond. Most school writing assignments give you direct instructions about your purpose, intended audience, and rhetorical occasion. Truly proficient and independent writers, however, learn to define their purpose, audiences, and contexts of their writing, on their own. The material in this chapter is designed to enable to become better at those tasks.

When you receive a writing assignment, it is very tempting to see it as just another hoop to jump through and not as a genuine rhetorical situation, an opportunity to influence others with your writing. It is certainly tempting to see yourself writing only for the teacher, without a real purpose and oblivious of the context of your writing.

The material of this chapter as well as the writing projects presented throughout this book are designed to help you think of writing as a persuasive, rhetorical activity. Conducting research and incorporating its results into your paper is a part of this rhetorical process.

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Persuasion/Argument

Writing for Success

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose and structure of persuasion in writing.
- Identify bias in writing.
- Assess various rhetorical devices.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Understand the importance of visuals to strengthen arguments.
- Write a persuasive essay.

THE PURPOSE OF PERSUASIVE WRITING

The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince, motivate, or move readers toward a certain point of view, or opinion. The act of trying to persuade automatically implies more than one opinion on the subject can be argued.

The idea of an argument often conjures up images of two people yelling and screaming in anger. In writing, however, an argument is very different. An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue in writing is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way. Written arguments often fail when they employ ranting rather than reasoning.

TIP

Most of us feel inclined to try to win the arguments we engage in. On some level, we all want to be right, and we want others to see the error of their ways. More times than not, however, arguments in which both sides try to win end up producing losers all around. The more productive approach is to persuade your

audience to consider your opinion as a valid one, not simply the right one.

THE STRUCTURE OF A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

The following five features make up the structure of a persuasive essay:

- Introduction and thesis
- Opposing and qualifying ideas
- Strong evidence in support of claim
- Style and tone of language
- A compelling conclusion

CREATING AN INTRODUCTION AND THESIS

The persuasive essay begins with an engaging introduction that presents the general topic. The thesis typically appears somewhere in the introduction and states the writer's point of view.

TIP

Avoid forming a thesis based on a negative claim. For example, "The hourly minimum wage is not high enough for the average worker to live on." This is probably a true statement, but persuasive arguments should make a positive case. That is, the thesis statement should focus on how the hourly minimum wage is low or insufficient.

ACKNOWLEDGING OPPOSING IDEAS AND LIMITS TO YOUR ARGUMENT

Because an argument implies differing points of view on the subject, you must be sure to acknowledge those opposing ideas. Avoiding ideas that conflict with your own gives the reader the impression that you may be uncertain, fearful, or unaware of opposing ideas. Thus it is essential that you not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully.

Try to address opposing arguments earlier rather than later in your essay. Rhetorically speaking, ordering your positive arguments last allows you to better address ideas that conflict with your own, so you can spend the rest of the essay countering those arguments. This

way, you leave your reader thinking about your argument rather than someone else's. You have the last word.

Acknowledging points of view different from your own also has the effect of fostering more credibility between you and the audience. They know from the outset that you are aware of opposing ideas and that you are not afraid to give them space.

It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish. In effect, you are conceding early on that your argument is not the ultimate authority on a given topic. Such humility can go a long way toward earning credibility and trust with an audience. Audience members will know from the beginning that you are a reasonable writer, and audience members will trust your argument as a result. For example, in the following concessionary statement, the writer advocates for stricter gun control laws, but she admits it will not solve all of our problems with crime:

Although tougher gun control laws are a powerful first step in decreasing violence in our streets, such legislation alone cannot end these problems since guns are not the only problem we face.

Such a concession will be welcome by those who might disagree with this writer's argument in the first place. To effectively persuade their readers, writers need to be modest in their goals and humble in their approach to get readers to listen to the ideas. See Table 10.5 "Phrases of Concession" for some useful phrases of concession.

Table 10.5 Phrases of Concession

although	granted that	of course
still	though	yet

Exercise 1

Try to form a thesis for each of the following topics. Remember the more specific your thesis, the better.

- Foreign policy
- Television and advertising
- Stereotypes and prejudice
- Gender roles and the workplace

- Driving and cell phones

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers. Choose the thesis statement that most interests you and discuss why.

BIAS IN WRITING

Everyone has various biases on any number of topics. For example, you might have a bias toward wearing black instead of brightly colored clothes or wearing jeans rather than formal wear. You might have a bias toward working at night rather than in the morning, or working by deadlines rather than getting tasks done in advance. These examples identify minor biases, of course, but they still indicate preferences and opinions.

Handling bias in writing and in daily life can be a useful skill. It will allow you to articulate your own points of view while also defending yourself against unreasonable points of view. The ideal in persuasive writing is to let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and a respectful and reasonable address of opposing sides.

The strength of a personal bias is that it can motivate you to construct a strong argument. If you are invested in the topic, you are more likely to care about the piece of writing. Similarly, the more you care, the more time and effort you are apt to put forth and the better the final product will be.

The weakness of bias is when the bias begins to take over the essay—when, for example, you neglect opposing ideas, exaggerate your points, or repeatedly insert yourself ahead of the subject by using I too often. Being aware of all three of these pitfalls will help you avoid them.

THE USE OF I IN WRITING

The use of I in writing is often a topic of debate, and the acceptance of its usage varies from instructor to instructor. It is difficult to predict the preferences for all your present and future instructors, but consider the effects it can potentially have on your writing.

Be mindful of the use of I in your writing because it can make your argument sound overly biased. There are two primary reasons:

1. Excessive repetition of any word will eventually catch the reader's attention—and usually not in a good way. The use of I is no different.
2. The insertion of I into a sentence alters not only the way a sentence might sound but also the composition of the sentence itself. I is often the subject of a sentence. If the subject of the essay is supposed to be, say, smoking, then by inserting yourself into the sentence, you are effectively displacing the subject of the essay into a secondary position. In the following example, the subject of the sentence is underlined:

Smoking is bad.

I think smoking is bad.

In the first sentence, the rightful subject, smoking, is in the subject position in the sentence. In the second sentence, the insertion of I and think replaces smoking as the subject, which draws attention to I and away from the topic that is supposed to be discussed. Remember to keep the message (the subject) and the messenger (the writer) separate.

CHECKLIST

Developing Sound Arguments

Does my essay contain the following elements?

- An engaging introduction
- A reasonable, specific thesis that is able to be supported by evidence
- A varied range of evidence from credible sources
- Respectful acknowledgement and explanation of opposing ideas
- A style and tone of language that is appropriate for the subject and audience
- Acknowledgement of the argument's limits
- A conclusion that will adequately summarize the essay and reinforce the thesis

FACT AND OPINION

Facts are statements that can be definitely proven using objective data. The statement that is a fact is absolutely valid. In other words, the statement can be pronounced as true or false. For example, $2 + 2 = 4$.

This expression identifies a true statement, or a fact, because it can be proved with objective data.

Opinions are personal views, or judgments. An opinion is what an individual believes about a particular subject. However, an opinion in argumentation must have legitimate backing; adequate evidence and credibility should support the opinion. Consider the credibility of expert opinions. Experts in a given field have the knowledge and credentials to make their opinion meaningful to a larger audience.

For example, you seek the opinion of your dentist when it comes to the health of your gums, and you seek the opinion of your mechanic when it comes to the maintenance of your car. Both have knowledge and credentials in those respective fields, which is why their opinions matter to you. But the authority of your dentist may be greatly diminished should he or she offer an opinion about your car, and vice versa.

In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions. Relying on one or the other will likely lose more of your audience than it gains.

TIP

The word prove is frequently used in the discussion of persuasive writing. Writers may claim that one piece of evidence or another proves the argument, but proving an argument is often not possible. No evidence proves a debatable topic one way or the other; that is why the topic is debatable. Facts can be proved, but opinions can only be supported, explained, and persuaded.

Exercise 2

On a separate sheet of paper, take three of the theses you formed in Exercise 1, and list the types of evidence you might use in support of that thesis.

Exercise 3

Using the evidence you provided in support of the three theses in Exercise 2, come up with at least one counterargument to each. Then write a concession statement, expressing the limits to each of your three arguments.

USING VISUAL ELEMENTS TO STRENGTHEN ARGUMENTS

Adding visual elements to a persuasive argument can often strengthen its persuasive effect. There are two main types of visual elements: quantitative visuals and qualitative visuals.

Quantitative visuals present data graphically. They allow the audience to see statistics spatially. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience. For example, sometimes it is easier to understand the disparity in certain statistics if you can see how the disparity looks graphically. Bar graphs, pie charts, Venn diagrams, histograms, and line graphs are all ways of presenting quantitative data in spatial dimensions.

Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions. Photographs and pictorial images are examples of qualitative visuals. Such images often try to convey a story, and seeing an actual example can carry more power than hearing or reading about the example. For example, one image of a child suffering from malnutrition will likely have more of an emotional impact than pages dedicated to describing that same condition in writing.

WRITING AT WORK

When making a business presentation, you typically have limited time to get across your idea. Providing visual elements for your audience can be an effective timesaving tool. Quantitative visuals in business presentations serve the same purpose as they do in persuasive writing. They should make logical appeals by showing numerical data in a spatial design. Quantitative visuals should be pictures that might appeal to your audience's emotions. You will find that many of the rhetorical devices used in writing are the same ones used in the workplace.

WRITING A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

Choose a topic that you feel passionate about. If your instructor requires you to write about a specific topic, approach the subject from an angle that interests you. Begin your essay with an engaging introduction. Your thesis should typically appear somewhere in your introduction.

Start by acknowledging and explaining points of view that may conflict with your own to build credibility and trust with your audience. Also state the limits of your argument. This too helps you sound more reasonable and honest to those who may naturally be inclined to disagree with your view. By respectfully acknowledging opposing arguments and conceding limitations to your own view, you set a measured and responsible tone for the essay.

Make your appeals in support of your thesis by using sound, credible evidence. Use a balance of facts and opinions from a wide range of sources, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and personal anecdotes. Each piece of evidence should be fully explained and clearly stated.

Make sure that your style and tone are appropriate for your subject and audience. Tailor your language and word choice to these two factors, while still being true to your own voice.

Finally, write a conclusion that effectively summarizes the main argument and reinforces your thesis.

Exercise 4

Choose one of the topics you have been working on throughout this section. Use the thesis, evidence, opposing argument, and concessionary statement as the basis for writing a full persuasive essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, clear explanations of all the evidence you present, and a strong conclusion.

Key Takeaways

- The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince or

move readers toward a certain point of view, or opinion.

- An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue, in writing, is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way.
- A thesis that expresses the opinion of the writer in more specific terms is better than one that is vague.
- It is essential that you not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully.
- It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish through a concession statement.
- To persuade a skeptical audience, you will need to use a wide range of evidence. Scientific studies, opinions from experts, historical precedent, statistics, personal anecdotes, and current events are all types of evidence that you might use in explaining your point.
- Make sure that your word choice and writing style is appropriate for both your subject and your audience.
- You should let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and respectfully and reasonably addressing opposing ideas.
- You should be mindful of the use of I in your writing because it can make your argument sound more biased than it needs to.
- Facts are statements that can be proven using objective data.
- Opinions are personal views, or judgments, that cannot be proven.
- In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions.
- Quantitative visuals present data graphically. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience.
- Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions.

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Part 5: Critical Reading

Most college writing begins as a response to a reading — whether assigned or found. As more and more interaction moves online, we are required daily to sort through written information with a swift and critical eye. Yet few of us are trained in how to determine what is and is not believable. Critical reading skills are vital to navigating college and the wider world, as this section's reading addresses.

Research and Critical Reading

Pavel Zemilansky

Learning Objectives

- Read critically to discover the meaning, purpose, and content of a piece
- Respond critically to written works using reading strategy

INTRODUCTION

Good researchers and writers examine their sources critically and actively. They do not just compile and summarize these research sources in their writing, but use them to create their own ideas, theories, and, ultimately, their own, new understanding of the topic they are researching. Such an approach means not taking the information and opinions that the sources contain at face value and for granted, but to investigate, test, and even doubt every claim, every example, every story, and every conclusion. It means not to sit back and let your sources control you, but to engage in active conversation with them and their authors. In order to be a good researcher and writer, one needs to be a critical and active reader.

This chapter is about the importance of critical and active reading. It is also about the connection between critical reading and active, strong writing. Much of the discussion you will find in this chapter is fundamental to research and writing, no matter what writing genre, medium, or academic discipline you read and write in. Every other approach to research writing, every other research method and assignment offered elsewhere in this book is, in some way, based upon the principles discussed in this chapter.

Reading is at the heart of the research process. No matter what kinds of research sources and, methods you use, you are always reading

and interpreting text. Most of us are used to hearing the word “reading” in relation to secondary sources, such as books, journals, magazines, websites, and so on. But even if you are using other research methods and sources, such as interviewing someone or surveying a group of people, you are reading. You are reading their subjects’ ideas and views on the topic you are investigating. Even if you are studying photographs, cultural artifacts, and other non-verbal research sources, you are reading them, too by trying to connect them to their cultural and social contexts and to understand their meaning. Principles of critical reading which we are about to discuss in this chapter apply to those research situations as well.

I like to think about reading and writing as not two separate activities but as two tightly connected parts of the same whole. That whole is the process of learning and making of new meaning. It may seem that reading and writing are complete opposite of one another. According to the popular view, when we read, we “consume” texts, and when we write, we “produce” texts. But this view of reading and writing is true only if you see reading as a passive process of taking in information from the text and not as an active and energetic process of making new meaning and new knowledge. Similarly, good writing does not come from nowhere but is usually based upon, or at least influenced by ideas, theories, and stories that come from reading. So, if, as a college student, you have ever wondered why your writing teachers have asked you to read books and articles and write responses to them, it is because writers who do not read and do not actively engage with their reading, have little to say to others.

We will begin this chapter with the definition of the term “critical reading.” We will consider its main characteristics and briefly touch upon ways to become an active and critical reader. Next, we will discuss the importance of critical reading for research and how reading critically can help you become a better researcher and make the research process more enjoyable. Also in this chapter, a student-writer offers us an insight into his critical reading and writing processes. This chapter also shows how critical reading can and should be used for critical and strong writing. And, as all other chapters, this one offers you activities and projects designed to help you implement the advice presented here into practice.

WHAT KIND OF READER ARE YOU?

You read a lot, probably more that you think. You read school textbooks, lecture notes, your classmates’ papers, and class websites.

When school ends, you probably read some fiction, magazines. But you also read other texts. These may include CD liner notes, product reviews, grocery lists, maps, driving directions, road signs, and the list can go on and on. And you don't read all these texts in the same way. You read them with different purposes and using different reading strategies and techniques. The first step towards becoming a critical and active reader is examining your reading process and your reading preferences. Therefore, you are invited to complete the following exploration activity.

Writing Activity: Analyzing Your Reading Habits

List all the reading you have done in the last week. Include both "school" and "out-of school" reading. Try to list as many texts as you can think of, no matter how short and unimportant they might seem. Now, answer the following questions.

- What was your purpose in reading each of those texts? Did you read for information, to pass a test, for enjoyment, to decide on a product you wanted to buy, and so on? Or, did you read to figure out some complex problem that keeps you awake at night?

- You have probably come up with a list of different purposes. How did each of those purposes influence your reading strategies? Did you take notes or try to memorize what you read? How long did it take you to read different texts? Did you begin at the beginning and read till you reached the end, or did you browse some texts? Consider the time of day you were reading. Consider even whether some texts tired you out or whether you thought they were "boring." Why?

- What did you do with the results of your reading? Did you use them for some practical purpose, such as buying a new product or finding directions, or did you use them for a less practical purpose, such as understanding some topic better or learning something about yourself and others?

When you finish, share your results with the rest of the class and with your instructor.

Having answered the questions above, you have probably noticed that your reading strategies differed depending on the reading task you were facing and on what you planned to do with the results of the

reading. If, for example, you read lecture notes in order to pass a test, chances are you “read for information,” or “for the main” point, trying to remember as much material as possible and anticipating possible test questions. If, on the other hand, you read a good novel, you probably just focused on following the story. Finally, if you were reading something that you hoped would help you answer some personal question or solve some personal problem, it is likely that you kept comparing and contrasting the information that you read your own life and your own experiences.

You may have spent more time on some reading tasks than others. For example, when we are interested in one particular piece of information or fact from a text, we usually put that text aside once we have located the information we were looking for. In other cases, you may have been reading for hours on end taking careful notes and asking questions.

If you share the results of your investigation into your reading habits with your classmates, you may also notice that some of their reading habits and strategies were different from yours. Like writing strategies, approaches to reading may vary from person to person depending on our previous experiences with different topics and types of reading materials, expectations we have of different texts, and, of course, the purpose with which we are reading.

Life presents us with a variety of reading situations which demand different reading strategies and techniques. Sometimes, it is important to be as efficient as possible and read purely for information or “the main point.” At other times, it is important to just “let go” and turn the pages following a good story, although this means not thinking about the story you are reading. At the heart of writing and research, however, lies the kind of reading known as critical reading. Critical examination of sources is what makes their use in research possible and what allows writers to create rhetorically effective and engaging texts.

KEY FEATURES OF CRITICAL READING

Critical readers are able to interact with the texts they read through carefully listening, writing, conversation, and questioning. They do not sit back and wait for the meaning of a text to come to them, but work hard in order to create such meaning. Critical readers are not made overnight. Becoming a critical reader will take a lot of practice and patience. Depending on your current reading philosophy and experiences with reading, becoming a critical reader may require a significant change in your whole understanding of the reading process.

The trade-off is worth it, however. By becoming a more critical and active reader, you will also become a better researcher and a better writer. Last but not least, you will enjoy reading and writing a whole lot more because you will become actively engaged in both.

One of my favorite passages describing the substance of critical and active reading comes from the introduction to their book *Ways of Reading*, whose authors David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky write:

Reading involves a fair measure of push and shove. You make your mark on the book and it makes its mark on you. Reading is not simply a matter of hanging back and waiting for a piece, or its author, to tell you what the writing has to say. In fact, one of the difficult things about reading is that the pages before you will begin to speak only when the authors are silent and you begin to speak in their place, sometimes for them—doing their work, continuing their projects—and sometimes for yourself, following your own agenda (1).

Notice that Bartholomae and Petrosky describe reading process in pro-active terms. Meaning of every text is “made,” not received. Readers need to “push and shove” in order to create their own, unique content of every text they read. It is up to you as a reader to make the pages in front of you “speak” by talking with and against the text, by questioning and expanding it.

Critical reading, then, is a two-way process. As reader, you are not a consumer of words, waiting patiently for ideas from the printed page or a web-site to fill your head and make you smarter. Instead, as a critical reader, you need to interact with what you read, asking questions of the author, testing every assertion, fact, or idea, and extending the text by adding your own understanding of the subject and your own personal experiences to your reading.

The following are key features of the critical approach to reading:

- No text, however well written and authoritative, contains its own, pre-determined meaning.
- Readers must work hard to create meaning from every text.
- Critical readers interact with the texts they read by questioning them, responding to them, and expanding them, usually in writing.
- To create meaning, critical readers use a variety of

approaches, strategies, and techniques which include applying their personal experiences and existing knowledge to the reading process.

- Critical readers seek actively out other texts, related to the topic of their investigation.

The following section is an examination of these claims about critical reading in more detail.

TEXTS PRESENT IDEAS, NOT ABSOLUTE TRUTHS

In order to understand the mechanisms and intellectual challenges of critical reading, we need to examine some of our deepest and long-lasting assumptions about reading. Perhaps the two most significant challenges facing anyone who wants to become a more active and analytical reader is understanding that printed texts do not contain inarguable truths and learning to question and talk back to those texts. Students in my writing classes often tell me that the biggest challenge they face in trying to become critical readers is getting away from the idea that they have to believe everything they read on a printed page. Years of schooling have taught many of us to believe that published texts present inarguable, almost absolute truths. The printed page has authority because, before publishing his or her work, every writer goes through a lengthy process of approval, review, revision, fact-checking, and so on. Consequently, this theory goes, what gets published must be true. And if it is true, it must be taken at face value, not questioned, challenged, or extended in any way.

Perhaps, the ultimate authority among the readings materials encountered by college belongs to the textbook. As students, we all have had to read and almost memorize textbook chapters in order to pass an exam. We read textbooks “for information,” summarizing their chapters, trying to find “the main points” and then reproducing these main points during exams. I have nothing against textbook as such, in fact, I am writing one right now. And it is certainly possible to read textbooks critically and actively. But, as I think about the challenges which many college students face trying to become active and critical readers, I come to the conclusion that the habit to read every text as if they were preparing for an exam on it, as if it was a source of unquestionable truth and knowledge prevents many from becoming active readers.

Treating texts as if they were sources of ultimate and unquestionable knowledge and truth represents the view of reading

as consumption. According to this view, writers produce ideas and knowledge, and we, readers, consume them. Of course, sometimes we have to assume this stance and read for information or the “main point” of a text. But it is critical reading that allows us to create new ideas from what we read and to become independent and creative learners.

Critical reading is a collaboration between the reader and the writer. It offers readers the ability to be active participants in the construction of meaning of every text they read and to use that meaning for their own learning and self-fulfillment. Not even the best researched and written text is absolutely complete and finished. Granted, most fields of knowledge have texts which are called “definitive.” Such texts usually represent our best current knowledge on their subjects. However, even the definitive works get revised over time and they are always open to questioning and different interpretations.

READING IS A RHETORICAL TOOL

To understand how the claim that every reader makes his or her meaning from texts works, it is necessary to examine what is known as the rhetorical theory of reading. The work that best describes and justifies the rhetorical reading theory is Douglas Brent's 1992 book *Reading as Rhetorical Invention: Knowledge, Persuasion, and the Teaching of Research-Based Writing*. I like to apply Brent's ideas to my discussions of critical reading because I think that they do a good job demystifying critical reading's main claims. Brent's theory of reading is a rhetorical device that puts significant substance behind the somewhat abstract ideas of active and critical reading, explaining how the mechanisms of active interaction between readers and texts actually work.

Briefly explained, Brent treats reading not only as a vehicle for transmitting information and knowledge, but also as a means of persuasion. In fact, according to Brent, knowledge equals persuasion because, in his words, “Knowledge is not simply what one has been told. Knowledge is what one believes, what one accepts as being at least provisionally true.” (xi). This short passage contains two assertions which are key to the understanding of mechanisms of critical reading. Firstly, notice that simply reading “for the main point” will not necessarily make you “believe” what you read. Surely, such reading can fill our heads with information, but will that information become our knowledge in a true sense, will we be persuaded by it, or will we simply memorize it to pass the test and forget it as soon as we pass it? Of course not! All of us can probably recall many instances in which we read a

lot to pass a test only to forget, with relief, what we read as soon as we left the classroom where that test was held. The purpose of reading and research, then, is not to get as much as information out of a text as possible but to change and update one's system of beliefs on a given subject (Brent 55-57).

Brent further states:

The way we believe or disbelieve certain texts clearly varies from one individual to the next. If you present a text that is remotely controversial to a group of people, some will be convinced by it and some not, and those who are convinced will be convinced in different degrees. The task of a rhetoric of reading is to explain systematically how these differences arise— how people are persuaded differently by texts (18).

Critical and active readers not only accept the possibility that the same texts will have different meanings for different people, but welcome this possibility as an inherent and indispensable feature of strong, engaged, and enjoyable reading process. To answer his own questions about what factors contribute to different readers' different interpretations of the same texts, Brent offers us the following principles that I have summarized from his book:

- Readers are guided by personal beliefs, assumptions, and pre-existing knowledge when interpreting texts. You can read more on the role of the reader's pre-existing knowledge in the construction of meaning later on in this chapter.
- Readers react differently to the logical proofs presented by the writers of texts.
- Readers react differently to emotional and ethical proofs presented by writers. For example, an emotional story told by a writer may resonate with one person more than with another because the first person lived through a similar experience and the second one did not, and so on.

The idea behind the rhetorical theory of reading is that when we read, we not only take in ideas, information, and facts, but instead we "update our view of the world." You cannot force someone to update their worldview, and therefore, the purpose of writing is persuasion and the purpose of reading is being persuaded. Persuasion is possible only when the reader is actively engaged with the text and understands that much more than simple retrieval of information is at stake when reading.

One of the primary factors that influence our decision to accept or not to accept an argument is what Douglas Brent calls our “repertoire of experience, much of [which] is gained through prior interaction with texts” (56). What this means is that when we read a new text, we do not begin with a clean slate, an empty mind. However unfamiliar the topic of this new reading may seem to us, we approach it with a large baggage of previous knowledge, experiences, points of view, and so on. When an argument “comes in” into our minds from a text, this text, by itself, cannot change our view on the subject. Our prior opinions and knowledge about the topic of the text we are reading will necessarily “filter out” what is incompatible with those views (Brent 56–57). This, of course, does not mean that, as readers, we should persist in keeping our old ideas about everything and actively resist learning new things. Rather, it suggests that the reading process is an interaction between the ideas in the text in front of us and our own ideas and pre-conceptions about the subject of our reading. We do not always consciously measure what we read according to our existing systems of knowledge and beliefs, but we measure it nevertheless. Reading, according to Brent, is judgment, and, like in life where we do not always consciously examine and analyze the reasons for which we make various decisions, evaluating a text often happens automatically or subconsciously (59).

Applied to research writing, Brent’s theory or reading means the following:

- The purpose of research is not simply to retrieve data, but to participate in a conversation about it. Simple summaries of sources is not research, and writers should be aiming for active interpretation of sources instead
- There is no such thing as an unbiased source. Writers make claims for personal reasons that critical readers need to learn to understand and evaluate.
- Feelings can be a source of shareable good reason for belief. Readers and writers need to use, judiciously, ethical and pathetic proofs in interpreting texts and in creating their own.
- Research is recursive. Critical readers and researchers never stop asking questions about their topic and never consider their research finished.

ACTIVE READERS LOOK FOR CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEXTS

Earlier on, I mentioned that one of the traits of active readers is their willingness to seek out other texts and people who may be able to help them in their research and learning. I find that for many beginning researchers and writers, the inability to seek out such connections often turns into a roadblock on their research route. Here is what I am talking about.

Recently, I asked my writing students to investigate some problem on campus and to propose a solution to it. I asked them to use both primary (interviews, surveys, etc.) and secondary (library, Internet, etc.) research. Conducting secondary research allows a writer to connect a local problem he or she is investigating and a local solution he or she is proposing with a national and even global context, and to see whether the local situation is typical or atypical.

One group of students decided to investigate the issue of racial and ethnic diversity on our campus. The lack of diversity is a “hot” issue on our campus, and recently an institutional task force was created to investigate possible ways of making our university more diverse.

The students had no trouble designing research questions and finding people to interview and survey. Their subjects included students and faculty as well as the university vice-president who was charged with overseeing the work of the diversity task force. Overall, these authors have little trouble conducting and interpreting primary research that led them to conclude that, indeed, our campus is not diverse enough and that most students would like to see the situation change.

The next step these writers took was to look at the websites of some other schools similar in size and nature to ours, to see how our university compared on the issue of campus diversity with others. They were able to find some statistics on the numbers of minorities at other colleges and universities that allowed them to create a certain backdrop for their primary research that they had conducted earlier.

But good writing goes beyond the local situation. Good writing tries to connect the local and the national and the global. It tries to look beyond the surface of the problem, beyond simply comparing numbers and other statistics. It seeks to understand the roots of a problem and propose a solution based on a local and well as a global situation and research. The primary and secondary research conducted by these students was not allowing them to make that step from analyzing local

data to understanding their problem in context. They needed some other type of research sources.

At that point, however, those writers hit an obstacle. How and where, they reasoned, would we find other secondary sources, such as books, journals, and websites, about the lack of diversity on our campus? The answer to that question was that, at this stage in their research and writing, they did not need to look for more sources about our local problem with the lack of diversity. They needed to look at diversity and ways to increase it as a national and global issue. They needed to generalize the problem and, instead of looking at a local example, to consider its implications for the issue they were studying overall. Such research would not only have allowed these writers to examine the problem as a whole but also to see how it was being solved in other places. This, in turn, might have helped them to propose a local solution.

Critical readers and researchers understand that it is not enough to look at the research question locally or narrowly. After conducting research and understanding their problem locally, or as it applies specifically to them, active researchers contextualize their investigation by seeking out texts and other sources which would allow them to see the big picture.

Sometimes, it is hard to understand how external texts which do not seem to talk directly about you can help you research and write about questions, problems, and issues in your own life. In her 2004 essay, "Developing 'Interesting Thoughts': Reading for Research," writing teacher and my former colleague Janette Martin tells a story of a student who was writing a paper about what it is like to be a collegiate athlete. The emerging theme in that paper was that of discipline and sacrifice required of student athletes. Simultaneously, that student was reading a chapter from the book by the French philosopher Michel Foucault called *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault's work is a study of the western penitentiary system, which, of course cannot be directly compared to experiences of a student athlete. At the same time, one of the leading themes in Foucault's work is discipline. Martin states that the student was able to see some connection between Foucault and her own life and use the reading for her research and writing (6). In addition to showing how related texts can be used to explore various aspects of the writer's own life, this example highlights the need to read texts critically and interpret them creatively. Such reading and research goes beyond simply comparing of facts and numbers and towards relating ideas and concepts with one another.

FROM READING TO WRITING

Reading and writing are the two essential tools of learning. Critical reading is not a process of passive consumption, but one of interaction and engagement between the reader and the text. Therefore, when reading critically and actively, it is important not only to take in the words on the page, but also to interpret and to reflect upon what you read through writing and discussing it with others.

CRITICAL READERS UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REACTING AND RESPONDING TO A TEXT

As stated earlier in this chapter, actively responding to difficult texts, posing questions, and analyzing ideas presented in them is the key to successful reading. The goal of an active reader is to engage in a conversation with the text he or she is reading. In order to fulfill this goal, it is important to understand the difference between reacting to the text and responding to it.

Reacting to a text is often done on an emotional, rather than on an intellectual level. It is quick and shallow. For example, if we encounter a text that advances arguments with which we strongly disagree, it is natural to dismiss those ideas out of hand as not wrong and not worthy of our attention. Doing so would be reacting to the text based only on emotions and on our pre-set opinions about its arguments. It is easy to see that reacting in this way does not take the reader any closer to understanding the text. A wall of disagreement that existed between the reader and the text before the reading continues to exist after the reading.

Responding to a text, on the other hand, requires a careful study of the ideas presented and arguments advanced in it. Critical readers who possess this skill are not willing to simply reject or accept the arguments presented in the text after the first reading right away. To continue with our example from the preceding paragraph, a reader who responds to a controversial text rather than reacting to it might apply several of the following strategies before forming and expressing an opinion about that text.

- Read the text several times, taking notes, asking questions, and underlining key places.
- Study why the author of the text advances ideas, arguments, and convictions, so different from the reader's own. For example, is the text's author advancing an agenda of some

social, political, religious, or economic group of which he or she is a member?

- Study the purpose and the intended audience of the text.
- Study the history of the argument presented in the text as much as possible. For example, modern texts on highly controversial issues such as the death penalty, abortion, or euthanasia often use past events, court cases, and other evidence to advance their claims. Knowing the history of the problem will help you to construct meaning of a difficult text.
- Study the social, political, and intellectual context in which the text was written. Good writers use social conditions to advance controversial ideas. Compare the context in which the text was written to the one in which it is read. For example, have social conditions changed, thus invalidating the argument or making it stronger?
- Consider the author's (and your own) previous knowledge of the issue at the center of the text and your experiences with it. How might such knowledge or experience have influenced your reception of the argument?

Taking all these steps will help you to move away from simply reacting to a text and towards constructing informed and critical response to it.

CRITICAL READERS RESIST OVERSIMPLIFIED BINARY RESPONSES

Critical readers learn to avoid simple “agree-disagree” responses to complex texts. Such way of thinking and arguing is often called “binary” because it allows only two answers to every statement and every questions. But the world of ideas is complex and, a much more nuanced approach is needed when dealing with complex arguments.

When you are asked to “critique” a text, which readers are often asked to do, it does not mean that you have to “criticize” it and reject its argument out of hand. What you are being asked to do instead is to carefully evaluate and analyze the text's ideas, to understand how and why they are constructed and presented, and only then develop a response to that text. Not every text asks for an outright agreement or disagreement. Sometimes, we as readers are not in a position to either simply support an argument or reject it. What we can do in such cases, though, is to learn more about the text's arguments by carefully considering all of their aspects and to construct a nuanced, sophisticated response to them. After you have done all that, it will still

be possible to disagree with the arguments presented in the reading, but your opinion about the text will be much more informed and nuanced than if you have taken the binary approach from the start.

TWO SAMPLE STUDENT RESPONSES

To illustrate the principles laid out in this section, consider the following two reading responses. Both texts respond to a very well known piece, “A Letter from Birmingham Jail,” by Martin Luther King, Jr. In the letter, King responds to criticism from other clergymen who had called his methods of civil rights struggle “unwise and untimely.” Both student writers were given the same response prompt:

After reading King’s piece several times and with a pen or pencil in hand, consider what shapes King’s letter. Specifically, what rhetorical strategies is he using to achieve a persuasive effect on his readers? In making your decisions, consider such factors as background information that he gives, ways in which he addresses his immediate audience, and others. Remember that your goal is to explore King’s text, thus enabling you to understand his rhetorical strategies better.

Example: Student A

Martin Luther King Jr’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” is a very powerful text. At the time when minorities in America were silenced and persecuted, King had the courage to lead his people in the struggle for equality. After being jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, King wrote a letter to his “fellow clergymen” describing his struggle for civil rights. In the letter, King recounts a brief history of that struggle and rejects the accusation that it is “unwise and untimely.” Overall, I think that King’s letter is a very rhetorically effective text, one that greatly helped Americans to understand the civil rights movement.

Example: Student B

King begins his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by addressing it to his “fellow clergymen.” Thus, he immediately sets the tone of inclusion rather than exclusion. By using the word “fellow” in the address, I think he is trying to do two things. First of all, he presents himself as a colleague and a spiritual brother of his audience. That, in effect, says “you can trust me,” “I am one of your kind.” Secondly, by addressing his readers in that way, King suggests that everyone, even those Americans who are not directly involved in the struggle for civil rights, should be concerned with it. Hence the word “fellow.” King’s opening almost invokes the phrase “My fellow Americans” or “My fellow citizens” used so often by American Presidents when they address the nation.

King then proceeds to give a brief background of his actions as a civil rights leader. As I read this part of the letter, I was wondering whether his readers would really have not known what he had accomplished as a civil rights leader. Then I realized that perhaps he gives all that background information as a rhetorical move. His immediate goal is to keep reminding his readers about his activities. His ultimate goal is to show to his audience that his actions were non-violent but peaceful. In reading this passage by King, I remembered once again that it is important not to assume that your audience knows anything about the subject of the writing. I will try to use this strategy more in my own papers.

In the middle of the letter, King states: “The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation.” This sentence looks like a thesis statement and I wonder why he did not place it towards the beginning of the text, to get his point across right away. After thinking about this for a few minutes and re-reading several pages from our class textbook, I think he leaves his “thesis” till later in his piece because he is facing a not-so-friendly (if not hostile) audience. Delaying the thesis and laying out some background information and evidence first helps a writer to prepare his or her audience for the coming argument. That is another strategy I should probably use more often in my own writing, depending on the audience I am facing.

REFLECTING ON THE RESPONSES

To be sure, much more can be said about King's letter than either of these writers have said. However, these two responses allow us to see two dramatically different approaches to reading. After studying both responses, consider the questions below.

- Which response fulfills the goals set in the prompt better and why?
- Which responses shows a deeper understanding of the texts by the reader and why?
- Which writer does a better job at avoiding binary thinking and creating a sophisticated reading of King's text and why?
- Which writer is more likely to use the results of the reading in his or her own writing in the future and why?
- Which writer leaves room for response to his text by others and why?

CRITICAL READERS DO NOT READ ALONE AND IN SILENCE

One of the key principles of critical reading is that active readers do not read silently and by themselves. By this I mean that they take notes and write about what they read. They also discuss the texts they are working with, with others and compare their own interpretations of those texts with the interpretations constructed by their colleagues.

As a college student, you are probably used to taking notes of what you read. When I was in college, my favorite way of preparing for a test was reading a chapter or two from my textbook, then closing the book, then trying to summarize what I have read on a piece of paper. I tried to get the main points of the chapters down and the explanations and proofs that the textbooks' authors used. Sometimes, I wrote a summary of every chapter in the textbook and then studied for the test from those summaries rather than from the textbook itself. I am sure you have favorite methods of note taking and studying from your notes, too.

But now it strikes me that what I did with those notes was not critical reading. I simply summarized my textbooks in a more concise, manageable form and then tried to memorize those summaries before the test. I did not take my reading of the textbooks any further than what was already on their pages. Reading for information and trying to extract the main points, I did not talk back to the texts, did not question them, and did not try to extend the knowledge which they offered in any way. I also did not try to connect my reading with my

personal experiences or pre-existing knowledge in any way. I also read in silence, without exchanging ideas with other readers of the same texts. Of course, my reading strategies and techniques were dictated by my goal, which was to pass the test.

Critical reading has other goals, one of which is entering an on-going intellectual exchange. Therefore it demands different reading strategies, approaches, and techniques. One of these new approaches is not reading in silence and alone. Instead, critical readers read with a pen or pencil in hand. They also discuss what they read with others.

STRATEGIES FOR CONNECTING READING AND WRITING

If you want to become a critical reader, you need to get into a habit of writing as you read. You also need to understand that complex texts cannot be read just once. Instead, they require multiple readings, the first of which may be a more general one during which you get acquainted with the ideas presented in the text, its structure and style. During the second and any subsequent readings, however, you will need to write, and write a lot. The following are some critical reading and writing techniques which active readers employ as they work to create meanings from texts they read.

UNDERLINE INTERESTING AND IMPORTANT PLACES IN THE TEXT

Underline words, sentences, and passages that stand out, for whatever reason. Underline the key arguments that you believe the author of the text is making as well as any evidence, examples, and stories that seem interesting or important. Don't be afraid to "get it wrong." There is no right or wrong here. The places in the text that you underline may be the same or different from those noticed by your classmates, and this difference of interpretation is the essence of critical reading.

TAKE NOTES

Take notes on the margins. If you do not want to write on your book or journal, attach post-it notes with your comments to the text. Do not be afraid to write too much. This is the stage of the reading process during which you are actively making meaning. Writing about what you read is the best way to make sense of it, especially, if the text is difficult.

Do not be afraid to write too much. This is the stage of the reading process during which you are actively making meaning. Writing about

what you read will help you not only to remember the argument which the author of the text is trying to advance (less important for critical reading), but to create your own interpretations of the text you are reading (more important).

Here are some things you can do in your comments

- Ask questions.
- Agree or disagree with the author.
- Question the evidence presented in the text
- Offer counter-evidence
- Offer additional evidence, examples, stories, and so on that support the author's argument
- Mention other texts which advance the same or similar arguments
- Mention personal experiences that enhance your reading of the text

WRITE EXPLORATORY RESPONSES

Write extended responses to readings. Writing students are often asked to write one or two page exploratory responses to readings, but they are not always clear on the purpose of these responses and on how to approach writing them. By writing reading responses, you are continuing the important work of critical reading which you began when you underlined interesting passages and took notes on the margins. You are extending the meaning of the text by creating your own commentary to it and perhaps even branching off into creating your own argument inspired by your reading. Your teacher may give you a writing prompt, or ask you to come up with your own topic for a response. In either case, realize that reading responses are supposed to be exploratory, designed to help you delve deeper into the text you are reading than note-taking or underlining will allow.

When writing extended responses to the readings, it is important to keep one thing in mind, and that is their purpose. The purpose of these exploratory responses, which are often rather informal, is not to produce a complete argument, with an introduction, thesis, body, and conclusion. It is not to impress your classmates and your teacher with “big” words and complex sentences. On the contrary, it is to help you understand the text you are working with at a deeper level. The verb “explore” means to investigate something by looking at it more closely. Investigators get leads, some of which are fruitful and useful and some of which are dead-ends. As you investigate and create the meaning of the text you are working with, do not be afraid to take different

directions with your reading response. In fact, it is important resist the urge to make conclusions or think that you have found out everything about your reading. When it comes to exploratory reading responses, lack of closure and presence of more leads at the end of the piece is usually a good thing. Of course, you should always check with your teacher for standards and format of reading responses.

Try the following guidelines to write a successful response to a reading:

Remember your goal—exploration. The purpose of writing a response is to construct the meaning of a difficult text. It is not to get the job done as quickly as possible and in as few words as possible.

As you write, “talk back to the text.” Make comments, ask questions, and elaborate on complex thoughts. This part of the writing becomes much easier if, prior to writing your response, you had read the assignment with a pen in hand and marked important places in the reading.

If your teacher provides a response prompt, make sure you understand it. Then try to answer the questions in the prompt to the best of your ability. While you are doing that, do not be afraid of bringing in related texts, examples, or experiences. Active reading is about making connections, and your readers will appreciate your work because it will help them understand the text better.

While your primary goal is exploration and questioning, make sure that others can understand your response. While it is OK to be informal in your response, make every effort to write in a clear, error-free language.

Involve your audience in the discussion of the reading by asking questions, expressing opinions, and connecting to responses made by others.

USE READING FOR INVENTION

Use reading and your responses to start your own formal writing projects. Reading is a powerful invention tool. While preparing to start a new writing project, go back to the readings you have completed and your responses to those readings in search for possible topics and ideas. Also look through responses your classmates gave to your ideas about the text. Another excellent way to start your own writing projects and to begin research for them is to look through the list of references and sources at the end of the reading that you are working with. They can provide excellent topic-generating and research leads.

KEEP A DOUBLE-ENTRY JOURNAL

Many writers like double-entry journals because they allow us to make that leap from summary of a source to interpretation and persuasion. To start a double-entry journal, divide a page into two columns. As you read, in the left column write down interesting and important words, sentences, quotations, and passages from the text. In the right column, right your reaction and responses to them. Be as formal or informal as you want. Record words, passages, and ideas from the text that you find useful for your paper, interesting, or, in any, way striking or unusual. Quote or summarize in full, accurately, and fairly. In the right-hand side column, ask the kinds of questions and provide the kinds of responses that will later enable you to create an original reading of the text you are working with and use that reading to create your own paper.

DON'T GIVE UP

If the text you are reading seems too complicated or “boring,” that might mean that you have not attacked it aggressively and critically enough. Complex texts are the ones worth pursuing and investigating because they present the most interesting ideas. Critical reading is a liberating practice because you do not have to worry about “getting it right.” As long as you make an effort to engage with the text and as long as you are willing to work hard on creating a meaning out of what you read, the interpretation of the text you are working with will be valid.

IMPORTANT: So far, we have established that no pre-existing meaning is possible in written texts and that critical and active readers work hard to create such meaning. We have also established that interpretations differ from reader to reader and that there is no “right” or “wrong” during the critical reading process. So, you may ask, does this mean that any reading of a text that I create will be a valid and persuasive one? With the exception of the most outlandish and purposely-irrelevant readings that have nothing to do with the sources text, the answer is “yes.” However, remember that reading and interpreting texts, as well as sharing your interpretations with others are rhetorical acts. First of all, in order to learn something from your critical reading experience, you, the reader, need to be persuaded by your own reading of the text. Secondly, for your reading to be accepted by others, they need to be persuaded by it, too. It does not mean, however, that in order to make your reading of a text

persuasive, you simply have to find “proof” in the text for your point of view. Doing that would mean reverting to reading “for the main point,” reading as consumption. Critical reading, on the other hand, requires a different approach. One of the components of this approach is the use of personal experiences, examples, stories, and knowledge for interpretive and persuasive purposes. This is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

ONE CRITICAL READER'S PATH TO CREATING A MEANING: A CASE STUDY

Earlier on in this chapter, we discussed the importance of using your existing knowledge and prior experience to create new meaning out of unfamiliar and difficult texts. In this section, I'd like to offer you one student writer's account of his meaning-making process. Before I do that, however, it is important for me to tell you a little about the class and the kinds of reading and writing assignments that its members worked on.

All the writing projects offered to the members of the class were promoted by readings, and students were expected to actively develop their own ideas and provide their own readings of assigned texts in their essays. The main text for the class was the anthology *Ways of Reading* edited by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky that contains challenging and complex texts. Like for most of his classmates, this approach to reading and writing was new to Alex who had told me earlier that he was used to reading “for information” or “for the main point”.

In preparation for the first writing project, the class read Adrienne Rich's essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision.” In her essay, Rich offers a moving account of her journey to becoming a writer. She makes the case for constantly “revising” one's life in the light of all new events and experiences. Rich blends voices and genres throughout the essay, using personal narrative, academic argument, and even poetry. As a result, Rich creates the kind of personal-public argument which, on the one hand, highlights her own life, and on the other, illustrates that Rich's life is typical for her time and her environment and that her readers can also learn from her experiences.

To many beginning readers and writers, who are used to a neat separation of “personal” and “academic” argument, such a blend of genres and styles may seem odd. In fact, one of the challenges that many of the students in the class faced was understanding why Rich chooses to blend personal writing with academic and what rhetorical effects she

achieves by doing so. After writing informal responses to the essay and discussing it in class, the students were offered the following writing assignment:

Although Rich tells a story of her own, she does so to provide an illustration of an even larger story—one about what it means to be a woman and a writer. Tell a story of your own about the ways you might be said to have been named or shaped or positioned by an established or powerful culture. Like Rich (and perhaps with similar hesitation), use your own experience as an illustration of both your own situation and the situation of people like you. You should imagine that the assignment is a way for you to use (and put to the test) some of Rich's terms, words like "re-vision," "renaming," and "structure." (Bartholomae and Petrosky 648).

Notice that this assignment does not ask students to simply analyze Rich's essay, to dissect its argument or "main points." Instead, writers are asked to work with their own experiences and events of their own lives in order to provide a reading of Rich which is affected and informed by the writers' own lives and own knowledge of life. This is critical reading in action when a reader creates his or her one's own meaning of a complex text by reflecting on the relationship between the content of that text and one's own life.

In response to the assignment, one of the class members, Alex Cimino-Hurt, wrote a paper that re-examined and re-evaluated his upbringing and how those factors have influenced his political and social views. In particular, Alex was trying to reconcile his own and his parents' anti-war views with the fact that a close relative of his was fighting in the war in Iraq as he worked on the paper. Alex used such terms as "revision" and "hesitation" to develop his piece.

Like most other writers in the class, initially Alex seemed a little puzzled, even confused by the requirement to read someone else's text through the prism of his own life and his own experiences. However, as he drafted, revised, and discussed his writing with his classmates and his instructor, the new approach to reading and writing became clearer to him. After finishing the paper, Alex commented on his reading strategies and techniques and on what he learned about critical reading during the project:

ON PREVIOUS READING HABITS AND TECHNIQUES

Previously when working on any project whether it be for a History, English, or any other class that involved reading and research, there was a certain amount of minimalism. As a student I tried to balance the least amount of effort with the best grade. I distinctly remember that before, being taught to skim over writing and reading so that I found “main” points and highlighted them. The value of thoroughly reading a piece was not taught because all that was needed was a shallow interpretation of whatever information that was provided followed by a regurgitation. [Critical reading] provided a dramatic difference in perspective and helped me learn to not only dissect the meaning of a piece, but also to see why the writer is using certain techniques or how the reading applies to my life.

ON DEVELOPING CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES

When reading critically I found that the most important thing for me was to set aside a block of time in which I wouldn't have to hurry my reading or skip parts to “Get the gist of it.” Developing an eye for...detail came in two ways. The first method is to read the text several times, and the second is to discuss it with my classmates and my teacher. It quickly became clear to me that the more I read a certain piece, the more I got from it as I became more comfortable with the prose and writing style. With respect to the second way, there is always something that you can miss and there is always a different perspective that can be brought to the table by either the teacher or a classmate.

ON READING RICH'S ESSAY

In reading Adrienne Rich's essay, the problem for me wasn't necessarily relating to her work but instead just finding the right perspective from which to read it. I was raised in a very open family so being able to relate to others was learned early in my life. Once I was able to parallel my perspective to hers, it was just a matter of composing my own story. Mine was my liberalism in conservative environments—the fact that frustrates me sometimes. I felt that her struggle

frustrated her, too. By using quotations from her work, I was able to show my own situation to my readers.

ON WRITING THE PAPER

The process that I went through to write an essay consisted of three stages. During the first stage, I wrote down every coherent idea I had for the essay as well as a few incoherent ones. This helped me create a lot of material to work with. While this initial material doesn't always have direction it provides a foundation for writing. The second stage involved rereading Rich's essay and deciding which parts of it might be relevant to my own story. Looking at my own life and at Rich's work together helped me consolidate my paper. The third and final stage involved taking what is left and refining the style of the paper and taking care of the mechanics.

ADVICE FOR CRITICAL READERS

The first key to being a critical and active reader is to find something in the piece that interests, bothers, encourages, or just confuses you. Use this to drive your analysis. Remember there is no such thing as a boring essay, only a boring reader.

- Reading something once is never enough so reading it quickly before class just won't cut it. Read it once to get your brain comfortable with the work, then read it again and actually try to understand what's going on in it. You can't read it too many times.
- Ask questions. It seems like a simple suggestion but if you never ask questions you'll never get any answers. So, while you're reading, think of questions and just write them down on a piece of paper lest you forget them after about a line and a half of reading.

CONCLUSION

Reading and writing are rhetorical processes, and one does not exist without the other. The goal of a good writer is to engage his or her readers into a dialog presented in the piece of writing. Similarly, the goal of a critical and active reader is to participate in that dialog and to have something to say back to the writer and to others. Writing leads to reading and reading leads to writing. We write because we

have something to say and we read because we are interested in ideas of others.

Reading what others have to say and responding to them help us make that all-important transition from simply having opinions about something to having ideas. Opinions are often over-simplified and fixed. They are not very useful because, if different people have different opinions that they are not willing to change or adjust, such people cannot work or think together. Ideas, on the other hand, are ever evolving, fluid, and flexible. Our ideas are informed and shaped by our interactions with others, both in person and through written texts. In a world where thought and action count, it is not enough to simply “agree to disagree.” Reading and writing, used together, allow us to discuss complex and difficult issues with others, to persuade and be persuaded, and, most importantly, to act.

Reading and writing are inextricably connected, and I hope that this chapter has shown you ways to use reading to inform and enrich your writing and your learning in general. The key to becoming an active, critical, and interested reader is the development of varied and effective reading techniques and strategies. I'd like to close this chapter with the words from the writer Alex Cimino-Hurt: “Being able to read critically is important no matter what you plan on doing with your career or life because it allows you to understand the world around you.”

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Part 6: THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH WRITING

The following chapters are from the online textbook, *The Process of Research Writing* by Steven D. Krause. The full text is available at:
<http://www.stevendkrause.com/tprw/>

Introduction

Chapter 1
Thinking Critically About Research

Chapter 2
Understanding and Using the Library and Internet for Research

Chapter 6
The Annotated Bibliography Exercise

Chapter 10
The Research Essay

Introduction

Why Write Research Projects?

- Writing With and For Academic Research: What is It?
- Research Writing With Computers and the Internet
- Approaching *The Process of Research Writing*: A Guide to Using this Book
 - * Writing as a Process: A Brief Explanation and Map
 - * Using this book

The title of this book is *The Process of Research Writing*, and in the nutshell, that is what the book is about. A lot of times, instructors and students tend to separate “thinking,” “researching,” and “writing” into different categories that aren’t necessarily very well connected. First you think, then you research, and then you write.

The reality is though that the possibilities and process of research writing are more complicated and much richer than that. We *think* about what it is we want to research and write about, but at the same time, we learn *what* to think based on our research and our writing. The goal of this book is to guide you through this process of research writing by emphasizing a series of exercises that touch on different and related parts of the research process.

But before going any further, you need to be aware of two important points about this book:

- **This book is an *introduction* to academic writing and research, and chances are you will keep learning about academic writing and research after this class is over.** You may have to take other writing classes where you will learn different approaches to the writing process, perhaps one where you will learn more about research writing in your discipline. However, even if this is your one and only “writing class” in your college career, you will have to learn more about academic writing for every class and every new academic writing project. Learning how to write well is not something that ends when the class ends. Learning how to write is an on-going, life-long process.
- **Academic writing is not the only kind of writing worth learning about, and it is not the only potential use for this book or this class.** The focus of *The Process of Research Writing* is the important, common, and challenging sort of writing students in a variety of disciplines tend to do, projects that use research to inform an audience and make some sort of point; specifically, academic research writing projects. But clearly, this is not the *only* kind of writing writers do.



Sometimes, students think introductory college writing courses are merely an extension of the writing courses they took in high school. This is true for some, but for the majority of new college students, the sort of writing required in college is different from the sort of writing required in high school. College writing tends to be based more on research than high school writing. Further, college-level instructors generally expect a more sophisticated and thoughtful interpretation of research from student writers. It is not enough to merely use more research in your writing; you also have to be able to think and write about the research you've done.

Besides helping you write different kinds of projects where you use research to support a point, the concepts about research you will learn from this course and *The Process of Research Writing* will help you become better *consumers* of information and research. And make no mistake about it: information that is (supposedly) backed up by research is everywhere in our day-to-day lives. News stories we see on television or read in magazines or newspapers are based on research. Legislators use research to argue for or against the passage of the laws that govern our society. Scientists use research to make progress in their work.

Even the most trivial information we all encounter is likely to be based on something that at least looks like research. Consider advertising: we are all familiar with "research-based" claims in advertising like "four out of five dentists agree" that a particular brand of toothpaste is the best, or that "studies show" that a specific type of deodorant keeps its wearers "fresh" longer. Advertisers use research like this in their advertisements for the same reason that scientists, news broadcasters, magazine writers, and just about anyone else trying to make a point uses research: it's persuasive and convinces consumers to buy a particular brand of toothpaste.

This is not to say that every time we buy toothpaste we carefully mull over the research we've heard mentioned in advertisements. However, using research to persuade an audience must work on some level because it is one of the most commonly employed devices in advertising.

One of the best ways to better understand how we are effected by the research we encounter in our lives is to learn more about the process of research by becoming better and more careful critical readers, writers, and researchers. Part of that process will include the research-based writing you do in this course. In other words, this book will be useful in helping you deal with the practical and immediate concern of how to write essays and other writing projects for college classes, particularly ones that use research to support a point. But perhaps more significantly, these same skills can help you write and read research-based texts well beyond college.



Academic Research Writing: What Is It?

Writing That Isn't "Research Writing"

Not all useful and valuable writing automatically involves research or can be called "academic research writing."

- **While poets, playwrights, and novelists frequently do research and base their writings on that research, what they produce doesn't constitute academic research writing.** The film *Shakespeare in Love* incorporated facts about Shakespeare's life and work to tell a touching, entertaining, and interesting story, but it was nonetheless a work of fiction since the writers, director, and actors clearly took liberties with the facts in order to tell their story. If you were writing a research project for a literature class which focuses on Shakespeare, you would not want to use *Shakespeare in Love* as evidence about how Shakespeare wrote his plays.
- **Essay exams are usually not a form of research writing.** When an instructor gives an essay exam, she usually is asking students to write about what they learned from the class readings, discussions, and lectures. While writing essay exams demand an understanding of the material, this isn't research writing because instructors aren't expecting students to do additional research on the topic.
- **All sorts of other kinds of writing we read and write all the time—letters, emails, journal entries, instructions, etc.—are not research writing.** Some writers include research in these and other forms of personal writing, and practicing some of these types of writing—particularly when you are trying to come up with an idea to write and research about in the first place—can be helpful in thinking through a research project. But when we set about to write a research project, most of us don't have these sorts of personal writing genres in mind.

So, what is "research writing"?

Research writing is writing that uses evidence (from journals, books, magazines, the Internet, experts, etc.) to persuade or inform an audience about a particular point.

Research writing exists in a variety of different forms. For example, academics, journalists, or other researchers write articles for journals or magazines; academics, professional writers and almost anyone create web pages that both use research to make some sort of point and that show readers how to find more research on a particular topic. All of these types of writing projects can be done



by a single writer who seeks advice from others, or by a number of writers who collaborate on the project.

Academic research writing—the specific focus of *The Process of Research Writing* and the sort of writing project you will probably need to write in this class—is a form of research writing. How is academic research writing different from other kinds of writing that involve research? The goal of this textbook is to answer that question, and academic research projects come in a variety of shapes and forms. (In fact, you may have noticed that *The Process of Research Writing* purposefully avoids the term “research paper” since this is only one of the many ways in which it is possible to present academic research). But in brief, academic research writing projects are a bit different from other kinds of research writing projects in three significant ways:

- **Thesis:** Academic research projects are organized around a point or a “thesis” that members of the intended audience would not accept as “common sense.” What an audience accepts as “common sense” depends a great deal on the audience, which is one of the many reasons why what “counts” as academic research varies from field to field. But audiences want to learn something new either by being informed about something they knew nothing about before or by reading a unique interpretation on the issue or the evidence.
- **Evidence:** Academic research projects rely almost exclusively on evidence in order to support this point. Academic research writers use evidence in order to convince their audiences that the point they are making is right. Of course, all writing uses other means of persuasion—appeals to emotion, to logic, to the credibility of the author, and so forth. But the readers of academic research writing projects are likely to be more persuaded by good evidence than by anything else.
“Evidence,” the information you use to support your point, includes readings you find in the library (journal and magazine articles, books, newspapers, and many other kinds of documents); materials from the Internet (web pages, information from databases, other Internet-based forums); and information you might be able to gather in other ways (interviews, field research, experiments, and so forth).
- **Citation:** Academic research projects use a detailed citation process in order to demonstrate to their readers where the evidence that supports the writer’s point came from. Unlike most types of “non-academic” research writing, academic research writers provide their readers with a great deal of detail about where they found the evidence they are using to support their point. This process is called *citation*, or “citing” of evidence. It can sometimes seem intimidating and confusing to writers new to the process of academic research writing, but it is really nothing more than explaining to your reader where your evidence came from.

Research Writing with Computers and the Internet



There are good reasons for writing with computers. To name just a few, computers help writers:

- **Revise more easily**, since you don't need to retype an entire draft;
- **Share their writing with others**, either electronically (on disk or via email) or in "hard copy" since the writer only needs to print additional copies;
- **Store and organize files**, since papers that might get lost or take up a lot of room can all fit onto a computer hard drive or a floppy diskette; and
- **Make correct and "nice looking" drafts** with the use of features like spelling and grammar checkers, and with design features that allow you to select different fonts and layouts.

Chances are, you already know these things.

If you are *not* using computers or the Internet in your academic research writing process, you need to try and learn more about the possibilities. It can be intimidating and time consuming to begin effectively using a computer, but there are few things that will be as rewarding for your academic writing career.

The Process of Research Writing: A Guide to Understanding this Book

Writing as a Process: A Brief Explanation and Map

No essay, story, or book (including this one) simply "appeared" one day from the writer's brain; rather, all writings are made after the writer, with the help of others, works through the process of writing.

Generally speaking, the process of writing involves:

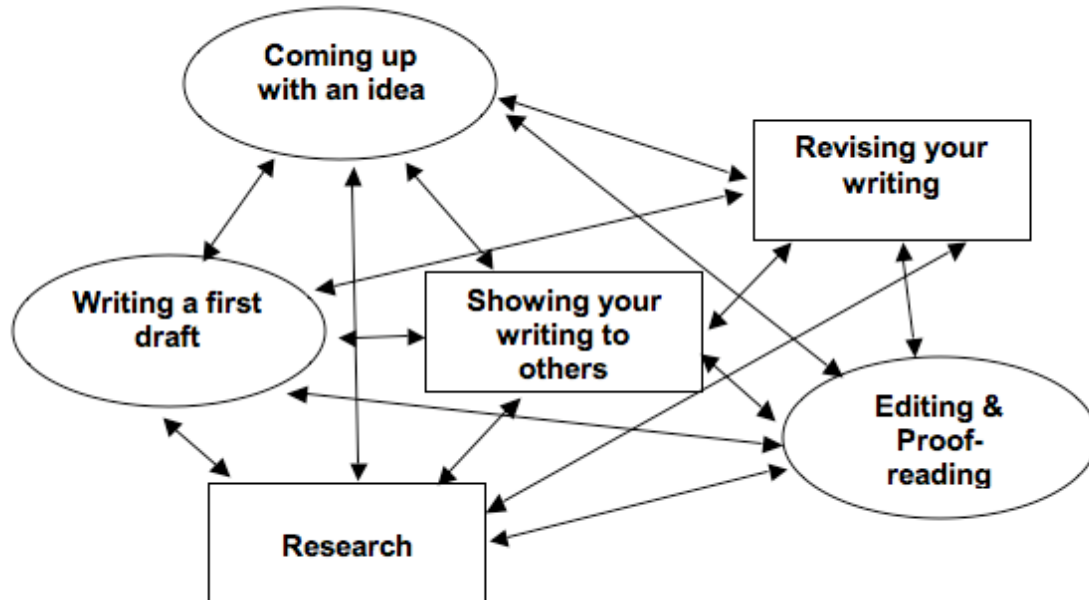
- **Coming up with an idea** (sometimes called brainstorming, invention or "pre-writing");
- **Writing a rough draft of that idea;**
- **Showing that rough draft to others to get feedback** (peers, instructors, colleagues, etc.);
- **Revising the draft** (sometimes many times); and
- **Proof-reading and editing** to correct minor mistakes and errors.

An added component in the writing process of research projects is, obviously, research. Rarely does research begin before at least some initial writing (even if it is nothing more than brainstorming or pre-writing exercises), and research is usually not completed until after the entire writing project is completed. Rather, research comes in to play at all parts of the process and can have a dramatic effect on the other parts of the process. Chances are you will need to do at least some simple research to develop an idea to write about in the first place. You might do the bulk of your research as you write your rough draft, though you will almost certainly have to do more research based on the revisions that you decide to make to your project.



There are two other things to think about within this simplified version of the process of writing. **First, the process of writing always takes place for some reason or purpose and within some context that potentially change the way you do these steps.** The process that you will go through in writing for this class will be different from the process you go through in responding to an essay question on a Sociology midterm or from sending an email to a friend. This is true in part because your purposes for writing these different kinds of texts are simply different.

Second, the process of writing isn't quite as linear and straight-forward as my list might suggest. Writers generally have to start by coming up with an idea, but writers often go back to their original idea and make changes in it after they write several drafts, do research, talk with others, and so on. The writing process might be more accurately represented like this:



Seem complicated? It is, or at least it can be.

So, instead of thinking of the writing process as an ordered list, you should think of it more as a “web” where different points can and do connect with each other in many different ways, and a process that changes according to the demands of each writing project. While you might write an essay where you follow the steps in the writing process in order (from coming up with an idea all the way to proofreading), writers also find themselves following the writing process out of order all the time. That’s okay. The key thing to remember about the writing process is that it is a process made up of many different steps, and writers are rarely successful if they “just write.”



Using this book

The Process of Research Writing is organized in a “step-by-step” fashion. Part I of the book, “The Elements of Research,” offers advice on getting started with research in the library, about quoting, paraphrasing, and not plagiarizing your research, and about working with others in the research process. Part II, “Exercises in the Process of Research,” presents five different writing exercises that will help you explore a research topic. Part III, “The Research Project,” offers guidelines for writing a traditional research essay, suggestions for alternative ways to present your research, and guidelines for using Modern Language Association and American Psychological Association citation.

But you should think of *The Process of Research Writing* as being similar to a cookbook or an encyclopedia: you don’t have to read or use this book in this particular order, and you and your teacher don’t need to use all of this book in order to write successful research projects. On the other hand, like a cookbook or an encyclopedia, you should feel free to go back to passages you’ve read before. Remember: thinking through your research process should be systematic, but it isn’t necessarily a linear one.



Chapter One

Thinking Critically About Research

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- What is “Research” and Why Should I Use It?
 - What’s Different about Academic Research?
 - Primary versus Secondary Research
 - Scholarly versus Non-Scholarly Sources
 - Sources that are Both Scholarly and Non-Scholarly?
 - The Internet: The Researcher’s Challenge
 - Evaluating the Quality and Credibility of Your Research
 - Complicating Factors in Evaluating the Credibility of Internet Research

What is “Research” and Why Should I Use It?

Research always begins with the goal of answering a question. In your quest to answer basic research questions, you turn to a variety of different sources for evidence: reference resources, people, evaluative and opinionated articles, and other sources. All along the way, you continually evaluate and re-evaluate the credibility of your sources.

For example, if you wanted to find out where you could buy the best computer within your budget, your question might be “what kind of computer should I buy and where should I buy it?” To answer your questions about computers, the first research tool you might use is the phone book, where you would look up “Computer retailers” in the yellow pages. You might also ask friends where they got their computers and what they thought were the best (and worst) stores to go to. You would probably also talk to your friends about the kind of computer they bought: a Windows-based PC versus a Macintosh computer, or a desktop versus a laptop computer, for example. You could go to a computer store and ask the salespeople for their advice, though you would perhaps be more critical of what they tell you since they are biased. After all, salespeople are trying to sell you a computer that they sell in their stores, not necessarily the “best” computer for the amount of money you want to spend. To get the opinions of computer experts, you might do research in computer magazines or web sites, looking for reviews and ratings of different models of computers in your price range.

Of course, you could skip this research process entirely. You could simply go to a store and buy the first computer in your budget based on nothing more than a “gut feeling” or based on some criteria that has little to do with the quality of the computer—the color, for example.

Who knows? By just guessing like this, you might actually end up with a computer as good as you would have ended up with after your research. After all, researchers can never be *certain* that the evidence they find to answer their research questions is entirely correct, and the fact that there are different kinds of computers available suggests it is possible for people to look at the research and



reach different conclusions about what is the "best computer." Talk to loyal Macintosh computer owners and you will get a very different answer about "the best" kind of computer than you will from loyal Windows PC owners!

Nonetheless, the likelihood is quite high that the computer you bought after careful research is a better choice than the computer you would have bought after conducting no research at all. Most of us would agree that you have a better chance of being "right" about your choice of computer (and just about anything else) if that choice is informed by research.

Exercise 1.1

Working alone or collaboratively in small groups, answer the following questions:

- **What are some examples of some of the decisions you have made that were based on a research method similar to the one described here? What do you think would have been the result of your decision had you not done any research?**
- **Can you think of any decisions that you have made that were not based on research? Would these decisions have turned out more favorably had you conducted some basic research?**
- **What kinds of decisions do think are potentially best made without research?**

What's Different about Academic Research?

The reasons academics and scholars conduct research are essentially the same as the reasons someone does research on the right computer to buy: to find information and answers to questions with a method that has a greater chance of being accurate than a guess or a "gut feeling." College professors in a history department, physicians at a medical school, graduate students studying physics, college juniors in a literature class, students in an introductory research writing class—all of these people are members of the academic community, and they all use research to find answers to their questions that have a greater chance of being "right" than making guesses or betting on feelings.

Students in an introductory research writing course are "academics," the same as college professors? Generally speaking, yes. You might not think of yourself as being a part of the same group as college professors or graduate students, but when you enter a college classroom, you are joining the academic community in the sense that you are expected to use your research to support your ideas and you are agreeing to the conventions of research within your discipline. Another way of looking at it: first-year college students and college professors more or less follow the same "rules" when it comes to making points supported by research and evidence.



A Student Profile:

Daniel Marvins, New to Academic Research

Daniel Marvins is a first year college student at a large public university in the Midwest. While he certainly wrote plenty of essays when he was in high school, Marvins thought that the kind of research writing his teacher was asking him to do for his writing class was different.

"In high school, we wrote more about stories and poems and newspaper articles we read," Marvins said. "We didn't do a lot of research, other than looking things up on the web."

Marvins was ready for the challenge of tackling the thinking and research that would be expected of him in college. But he still wasn't sure about being "an academic." "I never thought of it that way, because I didn't really see how the stuff I had to write for school made me anything like my teachers. But I guess I'm starting to see the connection."

Read Marvins' "Working Thesis Essay" in Chapter 5, "The Working Thesis Exercise."

Primary Research Versus Secondary Research

Before you begin to answer your questions, you'll need to know about two types of research: primary research and secondary research. And, you'll need to learn about the differences between them.

Primary research is usually the "raw stuff" of research—the materials that researchers gather on their own and then analyze in their writing. For example, primary research would include the following:

- The experiments done by chemists, physicists, biologists, and other scientists.
- Researcher-conducted interviews, surveys, polls, or observations.
- The particular documents or texts (novels, speeches, government documents, and so forth) studied by scholars in fields like English, history, or political science.

Secondary research is usually considered research from texts where one researcher is quoting someone else to make a point. For example, secondary research would include the following:

- An article in a scientific journal that reported on the results of someone else's experiment.
- A magazine or newspaper account of an interview, survey, or poll done by another researcher.



- An article in a scholarly journal or a book about a particular novel or speech.

When you quote from another article in your research project, your writing becomes an example of secondary research. When other researchers quote information from your research project in *their* research project, *your* research project is considered a secondary source for them. And if a researcher decides to write about you (a biography, for example) and if that researcher examines and quotes from some of the writings you did in college-- like the research project you are working on right now-- then your project would probably be considered a primary source.

Obviously, the divisions between primary and secondary research are not crystal-clear. But even though these differences between primary and secondary research are somewhat abstract, the differences are good ones to keep in mind as you consider what to research and as you conduct your research. For example, if you were writing a research project on the connection between pharmaceutical advertising and the high cost of prescription drugs, it would be useful and informative to consider the differences between primary research on the subject (an article where the researcher documents statistical connections) and the secondary research (an essay where another researcher summarizes a variety of studies done by others).

Of course, the term "secondary" research has nothing to do with the quality or value of the research; it just means that to answer the questions of your research project and to support your point, you are relying in great part on the observations and opinions of others.

Most research projects completed by students in writing classes are based almost exclusively in secondary research because most students in introductory writing classes don't have the time, resources, or expertise to conduct credible primary research. However, sometimes some modest primary research is a realistic option. For example, if you were writing about the dangers of Internet-based computer crime and someone on your campus was an expert in the subject and was available for an interview, your interview of her would be primary research. If you were writing about the problems of parking on your campus, you might conduct some primary research in the form of observations, surveys of the students that drive and try to park on campus, interviews of the campus officials in charge of parking, and so forth.



Exercise 1.2

Working alone or collaboratively in small groups, answer the following questions:

- **What other sorts of evidence do you think you would find that would count as “primary” research? What other sorts of evidence do you think would count as “secondary” research?**
- **Think about the kind of topics you are interested in researching and writing about. What sorts of “primary” research can you imagine examining that might be useful in your writing? What sorts of “secondary” research can you imagine examining that might be useful in your writing?**

Scholarly versus Non-Scholarly Sources

Before you begin to research you should be aware of the difference between “scholarly” and “non-scholarly” or popular sources.

Scholarly or academic publications are those where academics publish their research and opinions about topics of concern in their discipline. By and large, scholarly publications are highly specialized periodicals, as many of their titles suggest: *College Composition and Communication*, *Foodservice Research International*, or the *Journal of Analytic Social Work*. Scholarly periodicals tend to be published less frequently than popular sources, perhaps monthly, quarterly, or even less often. For the most part, the readers of scholarly journals are scholars themselves interested in the specific field of the publication—in other words, the articles in these publications are written for academics (both students and teachers) interested in the field, not a “general audience.” Because of the audience, the language of academic journals is often specialized and potentially difficult to understand for a reader not familiar with the field.

Scholarly or academic sources tend to be kind of bland in appearance: other than charts, graphs, and illustrations that appear predominantly in scientific publications, most academic journals include few color photos or flashy graphics. Most academic journals are not published in order to make a profit: while they frequently include some advertising, they usually only include a few ads to offset publication costs. Also, most academic journals are associated with academic organizations or institutions that subsidize and support their publication. Unless you are a subscriber, chances are the only place you will find most of these journals in your college or university library.

Usually, the articles that appear in academic journals indicate where the writer’s evidence comes from with footnotes, end notes, or information in parentheses. Most academic articles end with a “bibliography” or a “works cited” page, which is a list of the research the writer used in his essay. This practice—generally called “citation”—is particularly important in scholarly writing because the main audience of these articles (other scholars) is keenly interested in knowing where



the writers got their information. As a member of the academic community, you too will have to follow some system of citation in the research project you do for this and other classes.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See "Chapter 12: Citing Your Researching Using MLA or APA Style."

Non-scholarly or popular sources tend to be written by journalists and writers who are not necessarily experts about the subject they are writing about. While there certainly are specialized popular sources, they tend to have names most of us have seen on the magazine racks of grocery and drug stores—*GQ*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Sports Illustrated*, and so on—and even specialized popular sources tend to be written with a more general audience in mind. Writers of popular sources reach a general and broad audience by keeping the style of the writing in their articles approachable to people from a variety of different educational backgrounds—not necessarily members of the academic community.

Many popular periodicals are published weekly and almost all of them are published at least monthly. They tend to be visually appealing with lots of color photographs, graphics, and advertisements. Almost all popular sources are intended to make a profit, and some of the better known periodicals (*Time* or *Newsweek*, for example) sell millions of copies every week. Finally, popular sources rarely provide citation information about where the writer got her information.

Generally speaking, academic and non-academic books have characteristics that are similar to academic and non-academic periodicals. Academic books tend to be written by and for academics, are usually somewhat bland in appearance, tend to be published by companies that are supported by academic institutions, and tend to be only available at academic libraries or specialized bookstores. Non-academic books tend to be written by journalists or other writers trying to reach a more general audience, they are more eye-catching in appearance, they are published by large and for profit publishing companies, and they are more readily available at public libraries and bookstores.



Scholarly versus Non-Scholarly or Popular Sources

Scholarly Sources

- ✓ Usually titled according to their specialization (*College English*, *Journal of Analytic Social Work*, etc.)
- ✓ Contain articles written by and for academics with language that is highly specialized for academic readers
- ✓ Often published less frequently than monthly
- ✓ Usually fairly bland in appearance
- ✓ Generally not published "for profit" and usually supported by an academic organization or institution
- ✓ Almost always available only through subscription or at an academic library
- ✓ Most publish fewer than 5,000 copies of an issue
- ✓ Its articles follow some sort of citation system (MLA or APA, for example) that allow its readers to know where the writer's research comes from

Non-Scholarly or Popular Sources

- ✓ Often titled in ways that have little to do with their focus (*Newsweek*, *Time*, *People*, etc.)
- ✓ Contain articles written by journalists and in a language that is for a non-academic reader
- ✓ Almost always published at least monthly, and often weekly
- ✓ Visually appealing and attractive in appearance
- ✓ Generally published "for profit," and many well-known popular publications are very profitable; often supported by very large corporations
- ✓ Almost always readily available at bookstores, grocery and convenience stores
- ✓ Many publish tens of thousands of copies each issue
- ✓ Very rarely contain any sort of citation information that allows readers to know where writers found their information



Sources that are Both Scholarly and Non-Scholarly?

While these differences between scholarly and non-scholarly sources might seem straight-forward, many publications are somewhere in between scholarly and non-scholarly. A journal like *College English* is clearly an academic source and a magazine like *People* is clearly a popular source. But categorizing magazines like *Ms.*, *Harper's*, or *The Atlantic* is more difficult since these publications tend to publish articles that are in many ways similar to the articles published in more academic sources.

Another difficult to categorize source is corporate or "trade" journals. Most professions and industries have highly specialized publications about that particular business. For example, *Human Resource Executive* is targeted to professionals who work in Human Resources departments, *Accounting Today* is for and about the accounting business, and *Advertising Age* focuses on the advertising industry. While most of the writers and editors of trade journals do not have scholarly backgrounds, they tend to be highly focused and knowledgeable about their business. An article about hiring trends in *Human Resource Executive* will probably have more in common with an academic source than it will with a popular source.

A third "in between" type of research resource is newspapers. On the one hand, most newspapers would seem to share the characteristics of non-scholarly or popular sources: they are written for a general audience by writers who are not necessarily experts, they include many photographs and graphics, and so on. However, a number of publications like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* are quite different from most newspapers because they are written for a specialized audience, like college and community college teachers and administrators. Further, newspapers tend to be used by a wide variety of readers and writers--including scholars--as a source of basic and reliable information about day-to-day events.

In research writing courses, teachers will often insist students use only or mostly scholarly sources in their research projects because, as is discussed in some detail in the next section in this chapter, **scholarly sources tend to be more credible and reliable than non-scholarly sources.** This is not to say that popular sources aren't credible or reliable; clearly, most of them are, and in many cases, specialized popular sources can be very useful in academic research. A research project about computer crime may very well include relevant information from a popular source like *WIRED* or a trade publication written for people who work in the computer industry.

However, scholarly sources are generally considered *more* credible and reliable than popular sources. They tend to publish articles that go into more detail about their subjects, they are written for a more knowledgeable audience, and they are written by experts.



Exercise 1.3

Working alone or collaboratively in small groups, consider the following questions:

- **What sorts of scholarly sources are you and your classmates already familiar with? What sorts of non-scholarly sources of evidence are you already familiar with that might be useful for your research process?**
- **Think about the kind of topics you are interested in researching and writing about. Are you aware of any scholarly sources where you are likely to find research on your topic? What about popular or non-scholarly publications?**
- **If you are not yet familiar with specific titles of scholarly or popular sources that might be relevant for your topic, what kind of research would you conduct to find these sources?**

The Internet: The Researcher's Challenge

Along with the distinction between primary and secondary sources and the distinction between scholarly and non-scholarly publications, you now need to consider a relatively new type of research source as you gather your evidence: the Internet, particularly the World Wide Web. The Internet started up almost 30 years ago, and elements like electronic mail ("email") and bulletin board newsgroup discussions have been around for quite some time.

Widespread use of the Internet really took off in the early 1990s with the development of the World Wide Web and browser software like Mosaic, Netscape, and Internet Explorer. In fact, the Web has become such a powerful research resource that many beginning research writing students wonder why they should go to the library at all.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See the section "What's 'a library?' & 'What's The Internet?'" in Chapter 2, "Understanding and Using the Library and the Internet for Research."

The Web has become such a powerful medium in part because it has such a far reach—literally, anyone anywhere in the world who is connected to the World Wide Web with the right computer and the right software can access almost any of the hundreds of millions of "pages" and other documents on the Web. But it also has grown so quickly because it is relatively easy to put documents on to the Web. In fact, you too might consider exploring some of the options through your school or through a commercial service for joining the World Wide Web community by publishing your research project on the Web.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See the section "The Web-based Research Project" in Chapter 11, "Alternative Ways to Present Your Research."



Nowadays, the Web has become dominated by corporate and "mainstream" sites that are advertised on television and in traditional magazines and newspapers, which means that it is difficult for an individual's Web site to compete with the Web sites of *The New York Times* or amazon.com. But individuals can still publish their own Web sites, and individually published Web sites can still attract a large and international audience.

Indeed, one of the great strengths of the World Wide Web is that just about anyone can put up "professional looking" Web pages that can reach a potential audience of millions. However, this strength of the Web is also its weakness, at least as far as being a good place to look for research because *anyone* can publish what appears to be a "professional" Web site, regardless of his or qualifications.

This fact means the Web is significantly different from more traditional sources of research. Most scholarly publications are closely scrutinized by editors and other scholars within a particular field. Further, the articles that appear in even the most non-scholarly of popular sources pass through a variety of different writers and editors before they make it to press.

The problem with many Web pages is that the review process and editors that we assume to be in place with traditional print sources are simply not there. For example, it would be easy for me to fabricate a Web site (complete with charts, graphs, and fake statistics) that argued that students and teachers who used this textbook became more fit, richer, and better-looking. Such inaccurate claims would never pass the review process of a scholarly journal or a popular magazine--with the possible exception of the sort of tabloid we all see at the grocery store check-out that reports on Elvis sightings. But on the Web, it is just another page which, if someone finds it "believable," could be included in someone's research writing.





The Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division web site, <<http://www.dhmo.org>>, certainly *looks* like an official and reliable web site. What seems to make it a bit suspect? What exactly is Dihydrogen Monoxide, anyway?

More seriously, many deceptive and “professional” looking Web pages present *very* inaccurate and misleading information and they are not intended to be jokes. Some of these pages are the work of various hate groups—racists or Holocaust deniers, for example—and some of these sites seem to be the work of con artists. But when these sites are read uncritically, they can cause serious problems for academic researchers.

Of course, not *everything* you find on the Web is untrustworthy. Far from it. For one thing, the lines between what counts as an Internet source and a more traditional “print” source are beginning to blur. There are numerous online databases available in many libraries that have complete text versions of articles from academic and popular periodicals, and the articles from these databases are every bit as reliable as the traditional print sources.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See the discussion about electronically available periodicals in the section “Journals, Magazines, and Newspapers” in Chapter 2, “Understanding and Using the Library and the Internet for Research.”

Additionally, more and more traditional print sources are creating and maintaining Web sites. Almost all of the most popular news magazines, newspapers, and television networks have Web pages that either reproduce information available in more traditional formats or that publish articles specifically for the Web. More and more scholarly publications are becoming



available on the Web as well, and considering the international reach and low cost of publishing on the Web, it seems inevitable that more (maybe most) academic journals will eventually move from being traditional print journals to ones available only online.

Conversely, not everything you find in traditional print publications—either scholarly or non-scholarly—is always accurate and truthful. Despite the safeguards that most academic and popular publications follow to ensure they publish truthful and accurate articles, there are all sorts of examples of inaccuracies in print.

More common and therefore perhaps more problematic, small errors and misrepresentations appear in both academic and popular sources, evidence that the process of editorial review is not perfect. And what “counts” as true or accurate in many fields is a question of some debate and uncertainty, and this is frequently reflected in published articles of all sorts.

Here’s my point: as I will discuss in the next section of this chapter, the best way to ensure that your evidence is reliable, regardless of where you found that evidence, is to seek out a variety of different types of evidence and to think critically about the quality and credibility of your sources. This is particularly true with Web-based research.

Exercise 1.4

Working alone or collaboratively in small groups, consider the following questions:

- **Think of a web site that you visit on a regular basis. What makes this site a useful and credible resource for you?**
- **Are there any Web sites that you have come across that you thought were not believable or credible? Why did you find this site not believable?**

Evaluating the quality and credibility of your research

Finding evidence that answers a question is only the first part of the research process. You also have to evaluate the quality and credibility of your research. Inevitably, as we’ve already seen in this chapter, you do this as you consider the origins of your research—primary versus secondary research, scholarly versus popular sources, the Internet, and so forth. But evaluating the quality and credibility of your research is more subtle and complicated than just determining the source of the evidence. Consider again the example from the beginning of this chapter about deciding which computer to buy. One of the things you would have to weigh is the credibility of the information you received from your friends compared to the information you received from a salesperson at the computer store. You can probably count on your friends to be trustworthy and



honest, but they might not know much about computers. Conversely, while a salesperson might know a lot about computers, you may be uncertain to what extent you can trust him to give you the best advice. The salesperson wants to sell you a computer, which means that his motivations might be consciously or unconsciously influencing the information he is providing you.

Who should you trust? We have all been in situations like this, and there is no easy way to answer that question. Chances are, you'll make your computer decision based on your interpretation of the evidence and based on what you perceive to be the reliability and credibility of your different sources. If someone else were faced with the same computer decision and the same evidence, they might make a different choice. That is why there are different kinds of computers on the market and that is why different people can do the same sort of research about "the best" computer and why they can arrive at different conclusions.

Academic research is not much different in the sense that different researchers, considering the same or similar evidence, often arrive at different conclusions. Academic research rarely provides clear answers in the sense of definitively knowing the "rights" and "wrongs" about some issue. Not all academics think that computer hacking is wrong (or right), that the solution to commercial over-fishing is strict international control, or that F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* depicts the connection between material goods and the American dream. Rather, there are debates about these issues, differences of interpretation and opinion that result from different researchers looking at the same evidence.

Furthermore, the debates about differences of opinion on how to interpret evidence are good and healthy because these discussions further our understanding of complex issues. If we all agreed that something was true, then there would be no point in conducting research and writing about it. Indeed, if we all agreed about everything and had all of our questions answered as well as we thought possible, there would be no point to education at all!

Ultimately, there is no easy formula for evaluating the credibility and reliability of research. But there are some basic questions you should ask about your all of your evidence to ensure it is reliable and credible:

- Who wrote it?
- What do you think motivated the writer?
- Where was it published?
- When was it written?

Who wrote or said it?

✓ *Is there an author named with the evidence?*

If your evidence does not name the author, it might still be reliable, especially if you have confidence about where the evidence was published. However, most credible and reliable publications tell readers who wrote the articles they contain.



On Web pages and other Internet-based sources, it can sometimes be tricky to find the name of the Web page's author. Many web sites don't name an author, which, given the nature of the Web, should send up red flags for you as a researcher regarding the credibility of the evidence. But like print publications, more credible Web pages will include the name of the page's writer. Be sure to look for the writer's name throughout the particular page (including the bottom) and related pages within the Web site.

- ✓ *What are the qualifications of the author?*
- ✓ *Does he or she seem to be an expert in the field?*
- ✓ *Have he or she written about this topic before?*
- ✓ *Are there other experiences that seem to uniquely qualify him or her as a reliable and credible source on this topic?*

Many academic publications will give a lot of detail about their authors, including their degrees and academic training, the institution where they work (if they are a college professor or instructor), and other publications they have had in the past. Popular sources tend to include less information about their writers, though they too will often indicate in a byline (where the writer's name is listed in a magazine or newspaper article) if the writer is a reporter, contributing editor, or editor for a particular subject.

Credible web sources will also describe the qualifications of the source's author or authors. If you can find an author's name on a Web site but you can't find anything about their qualifications on their research subject, you should be suspicious about what that research has to say.

- ✓ *Have you come across the writer based on some of the other research you have done?*

After you have conducted a bit of research on your topic, you might find yourself coming across the same authors writing similar articles in different publications. You might also find different publications referring to the author or her work, which would suggest that the author is indeed reliable and credible in her field. After all, if other articles and writers refer positively to a particular writer or her articles again and again, then it seems likely that the often-referred-to writer is credible.

Understanding and trusting the expertise of the author of your evidence is probably the most crucial test of credibility and reliability of that evidence.



Simply put, academics find evidence that comes from an author who is a credible expert to be much more persuasive than evidence that does not come from an expert.

For example, while my mom is a reliable source of information regarding many different topics, it would do you little good for me to interview her for an academic research project about the problems of over-fishing. Mind you, I value my mom's thoughts and wisdom, and she might have some things to say about the effects of decreased catches of fish that I find insightful. However, because my mom doesn't have any expertise about commercial fishing and because she doesn't know anything more (or less) about it than most people, most of the readers of my research project won't be persuaded by what she has to say.

On the other hand, my mother was a hospice worker for many years, working with terminally ill patients and their families. If I were conducting research about the advantages and disadvantages of hospice care for terminally ill patients, my mom might be a very interesting and credible source.

What do you think motivated the writer?

- ✓ *Is the writer identified with a particular organization or group that might have a specific interest in the subject of the writing?*

This can often be the source of conscious or unconscious bias. An obvious example: a writer who is identified as a member of the National Rifleman's Association, which represents a variety of Americans particularly interested in protecting the right to own guns, will certainly have a different view on gun ownership than a member of The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, an organization working to enact gun control legislation.

You need to be particularly careful with Web-based sources of research when considering the writer's affiliation with different groups or organizations. There have been numerous incidents where Web page writers falsely claimed their Web pages were affiliated with particular groups or causes.

- ✓ *Does the writer identify himself or herself with an explicit political group or party?*

Considering a writer's politics is particularly important when thinking about the credibility of a Web site. Besides the ease with which a writer



can misrepresent themselves or others, the low cost and wide reach of the Web has also made it an attractive forum for hate groups, terrorists, and other "fringe" political movements. This doesn't automatically mean the information you find on reactionary or radical Web sites is wrong; however, writers with particularly strong and extreme politics frequently present information that is biased to the point of inaccuracy.

Of course, while it is important to consider why a writer wrote about her subject and to think about how her motivations impact how she wrote about his or her subject, having a particular bias or motivation doesn't automatically lead to a lack of credibility or reliability.

Where was it published?

✓ ***Was the piece of writing published in an academic or non-academic source? A book, a journal, a magazine, etc.?*** I've already discussed this a great deal in this chapter; generally speaking, academic sources are considered more credible than non-academic sources, and print-based sources are generally considered more credible than web-based sources.

But there are some more subtle tests of credibility and reliability concerning where a piece of research was published. For example, single-authored or co-authored scholarly books on a particular subject might be more regarded as more credible than a scholarly journal article because books go into much greater detail on topics than journal articles.

✓ ***Are you familiar with the publication?*** If you are a new researcher to a particular field of study this can be a difficult question to answer since you might not have heard of some of the more well-known and credible publications known in that field. But once you get to know the field better (which will inevitably be the case as you conduct more research on your topic), chances are you will begin to realize certain publications are seen by experts in the field as more credible than others.

When was it written?

Last, but far from least, the date of publication can dramatically effect the credibility of your research. Obviously, this is especially important for date-sensitive research topics. If you were writing a research project about the Internet and the World Wide Web, chances are any research older than about 1990 or so would be of limited use since the Web literally did not exist before 1990.

But other potentially less obvious topics of research have date sensitive components to them. For example, if you were doing research on cigarette smoking or drunk driving, you would have to be careful about evaluating the credibility of research from the 1970s or 1960s or earlier since cultural "norms" in the United States for both smoking and drinking have changed a great deal.



Knowing (or rather, *not* knowing) the date of publication of a piece of research is yet another thing to be worried about when evaluating the credibility of Web-based sources. Many Web sites do not include any information about the date of publication or the date when the page was last updated. This means that you have no way of knowing when the information on that dateless page was published.

The date of publication is a key piece of information, the sort of thing that is always included in more print sources. Again, just because the date of publication or update is missing from a Web site does not automatically discount it as a credible source; however, it should make you suspicious.

Exercise 1.5

Working alone or collaboratively in small groups, consider a variety of different types of research—articles from scholarly and non-scholarly sources, newspaper articles, books, web sites, and other types of evidence. Using the criteria discussed here, how would you rate the quality and credibility of your research? Which of your sources seems the most reliable? Are there any pieces of evidence that, upon closer examination, do not seem credible or reliable?



Evidence Quality and Credibility Checklist

- ✓ **Who** wrote or said it?
 - The writer's name
 - Qualifications
 - Expertise in the field
 - Previous publications on the topic
 - Unique experiences of the writer
- ✓ **Why** did the source write or say it?
 - Association with an organization or group
 - The writer's stated or implied politics
- ✓ **Where** (what source) was it published?
 - Academic/scholarly source versus non-academic/popular source
 - Prior knowledge of publication
- ✓ **When** was it published or said?
- ✓ **And when it comes to evidence from the 'net and World Wide Web...**
 - It's still important to know **who** wrote it, **why** you think they wrote it, **where** you found it online, and **when** was it published.
 - If you **don't know** the answers to the who/why/where/when questions, you should be skeptical of the evidence.
 - Don't be fooled by Web sites that "look" real, because...
 - **Anybody can publish information on the Web, no matter what that information is.** Unlike most scholarly and many non-scholarly publications, Web writers don't have to have the work reviewed by editors and publishers to reach an audience.
 - **The Internet and the World Wide Web are still good places to find research.** You just have to be a bit more careful with them.



Chapter Two

Understanding and Using the Library and the Internet for Research

- Defining “The Library” and “The Internet:” An Introduction
- Researching in the Library
 - * Books
 - * Journals, Magazines, and Newspapers (Periodicals)
 - * Periodical Indexes
 - * Accessing an Article
 - * Periodicals from Electronic Databases
 - * Some Final Tips
 - * Other Library Materials (Government documents, Interlibrary loan, Theses and dissertations, rare books and special collections)
- Researching on the Internet
 - * Email
 - * A Word about “Netiquette”
 - * The World Wide Web
 - * Search Engines
 - * Metasearch Engines
 - * Web Directories

Defining “The Library” and “The Internet:” An Introduction

You might think the answers to the questions “what is a library?” and “what is the Internet?” are pretty obvious. But actually, it is easy to get them confused, and there are a number of research resources that are a bit of both: library materials available over the Internet or Internet resources available in the library.

Understanding the differences between the library and the Internet and knowing where your research comes from is crucial in the process of research writing because **research that is available from libraries (either in print or electronic form) is generally considered more reliable and credible than research available only over the Internet.** Most of the publications in libraries (particularly in academic libraries) have gone through some sort of review process. They have been read and examined by editors, other writers, critics, experts in the field, and librarians.

In contrast, anyone with appropriate access to the Internet can put up a Web page about almost anything without anyone else being involved in the process:



no editors, other writers, critics, experts, or anyone else review the credibility or reliability of the evidence.

However, the line between what counts as library research and what counts as Internet research is becoming blurred. Plenty of reliable and credible Internet-based research resources are available: online academic and popular journals, Web-based versions of online newspapers, the homepages of experts in a particular field, and so forth.

Let’s begin with the basics of understanding the differences between libraries and the Internet.

Libraries are buildings that house and catalog books, magazines, journals, microfilm, maps, government documents, and other resources. It would be surprising if you attended a community college, college, or university that did not have a library, and it would be equally surprising if your school’s library wasn’t a prominent and important building on campus.

As you might expect, libraries at community colleges, colleges, and universities tend to specialize in scholarly materials, while public libraries tend to specialize in non-scholarly materials. You are more likely to find *People* magazine or the latest best-selling novels in a public library and a journal like *College English* and scholarly books in a college library.

Many universities have different libraries based on distinctions like who tends to use them (“graduate” or “undergraduate” libraries) or based on specific subject matter collected within that particular library (education, social work, law, or medicine). Almost all college and university libraries also have collections of “special items,” which include items like rare books, maps, and government documents.

While we tend to see the library as a “place,” most people see the **Internet** as something less physically tangible (though still somehow a “place”). Basically, the Internet is the international network of computers that makes things like email, the World Wide Web, blogs, and online chat possible. In the early 1970s, the beginnings of the Internet (then known as “ARPANET”) consisted of about a half-dozen computers located at research universities in the United States. Today, the Internet is made up of tens of millions of computers in almost every part of the world. The World Wide Web appeared in the mid-1990s and has dramatically changed the Internet. The Web and the Web-reading software called “browsers” (Internet Explorer and Netscape, for example) have made it possible for users to view or “surf” a rich mix of Web pages with text, graphics, animations, and video.

Almost all universities, colleges, and community colleges in the United States provide students and faculty with access to the Internet so they can use email and the World Wide Web, or even so they can publish Web pages. Millions of people both in and out of school have access to the Internet through “Internet



Service Providers," which are companies both large and small that provide customers access to the 'net for a monthly fee.

An enormous variety of information, text, and media are available to almost anyone via the Internet: discussion groups, books available for download or for online reading, journal and magazine articles, music and video clips, virtual "rooms" for live "chats."

In the simplest sense, the differences between libraries and the Internet is clear: buildings, books, magazines, and other physical materials, versus computers everywhere connected via networks, the World Wide Web, and other electronic, digitized, or "virtual" materials.

However, in practice, these differences are not always so clear.

First, almost all university, college, and community college libraries provide patrons access to the Internet on their campuses. Being able to access almost anything that is available on the Internet at computers in your library has the effect of blurring the border between library and non-library resources. And just because you happened to find your research on a Web page while you were physically in the library obviously doesn't make your Web-based research as credible as the materials housed within the library.

Second, many libraries use the Internet or the World Wide Web to provide access to electronic databases, some of which even contain "full text" versions of print publications. This will be covered in more detail in the next section of this chapter, "Finding Research in the Library: An Overview;" however, generally speaking, the research from these resources (even though it *looks* a lot like what you might find on a variety of Internet-based Web pages) is considered as reliable and credible as more traditional print sources.

Third, most libraries allow for patrons to search their collections via the Internet. With an adequate Internet connection, you don't have to actually go to the library to use the library.

The point is that while some obvious differences still exist between research you find in the library versus research you find on the Internet, there are many interesting similarities and points where the library and the Internet are actually one in the same.



Libraries, The Internet, and Somewhere In-between

Libraries	Somewhere In-between	The Internet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional books • Traditional academic journals and popular magazines • Newspapers • Microfilm and microfiche documents • Government documents • Rare books and materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronically reproduced books • Digitized articles from journals or magazines found in a library database • Database search tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email between friends • Newsgroups • Personal homepages • Internet Search Engines • Web versions of printed newspapers • Web-based academic journals or popular "magazines" • Web pages for groups or organizations

Researching in the Library

The best source for information about how to find things in your library will come directly from the librarians who can answer your questions. But here is an overview of the way most academic libraries are organized and some guidelines for finding materials in the library.

On most campuses, the main library is a very prominent building, although some schools have several smaller libraries focused on particular subjects housed within other academic buildings. Almost all libraries have a *circulation desk*, where patrons can check out items. Most libraries also have an *information or reference desk* that is staffed with reference librarians to answer your questions about using reference materials, about the databases available for research, and other questions about finding materials in the library. Libraries usually have a place where you can make photocopies for a small cost and they frequently have computer labs available to patrons for word processing or connecting to the Internet.

Many libraries still have a centralized area with computer terminals that are connected to the library's computerized databases, though increasingly, these terminals are located throughout the building instead of in one specific area. (Very few libraries still actually have card catalogs, and when they do, these catalogs are usually for specialized and small collections of materials.) You will



want to get familiar with your library's database software because it will be your key resource in finding just about anything in the building.

Libraries tend to have particular reading rooms or places where they keep current newspapers and periodicals, and where they keep bound periodicals, which are previous editions of journals and magazines bound together by volume or year and kept on the shelf like books. Many libraries also have specialized areas where they keep government documents, rare books and manuscripts, maps, video tapes, and so forth.

How do you find any of these things in the library? Here are some guidelines for finding books, journals, magazines, and newspapers.

Books

You will need to use the library's computerized catalog to find books the library owns. Most library database systems allow you to conduct similar types of searches for books. Typically, you can search by:

Author or editor. Usually, this is a "last name first" search, as in "Krause, Steven D." If you are looking for the name of a writer who contributed a chapter to a collection of essays, try using a "key word" search instead.

Title. Most library databases will allow you to search by typing in the complete title or part of the title.

Key word. This is different from the other types of searches in that it is a search that will find whatever words or phrases you type in.

Whatever you type into a key word search is what you're going to get back. For example, if you typed in "commercial fishing" into a key word search, you are likely to get results about the commercial fishing industry, but also about "commercials" (perhaps books about advertising) and about "fishing" (perhaps "how to" books on fly fishing, or a reference to the short story collection *Trout Fishing in America*).

Most library computer databases will allow you to do more advanced key word searches that will find phrases, parts of words, entries before or after a certain date, and so forth. You can also increase the quality of your results by doing more keyword searches with synonyms of the word or words you originally have in mind. For example, if you do a keyword search for "commercial fishing," you might also want to try searching for "fish farming," "fisheries," or "fishing industry."

Library of Congress Subject. Chances are, your university, college, or community college library arranges their books according to the same system used by the U.S. Library of Congress. (The other common system, the Dewey Decimal System, is sometimes the organizational system used



at public libraries and high school libraries.) The Library of Congress system has a long but specific list of subjects that is used to categorize every item. For example, here are some Library of Congress subjects that might be of interest to someone doing research on the ethical practices of the pharmaceutical industry:

- Pharmaceutical ethics.
- Pharmaceutical ethics, United States.
- Pharmaceutical industry.
- Pharmaceutical industry, Corrupt practices, United States.

Each one of these categories is actually a Library of Congress subject that is used to categorize books and materials. In other words, when a new book on pharmaceuticals comes into the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., a librarian categorizes it according to previously determined subject categories and assigns the book a number based on that category. These "official" categories and the related Library of Congress Call Numbers (more on that in a moment) are the way that libraries that use the Library of Congress system keep track of their books.

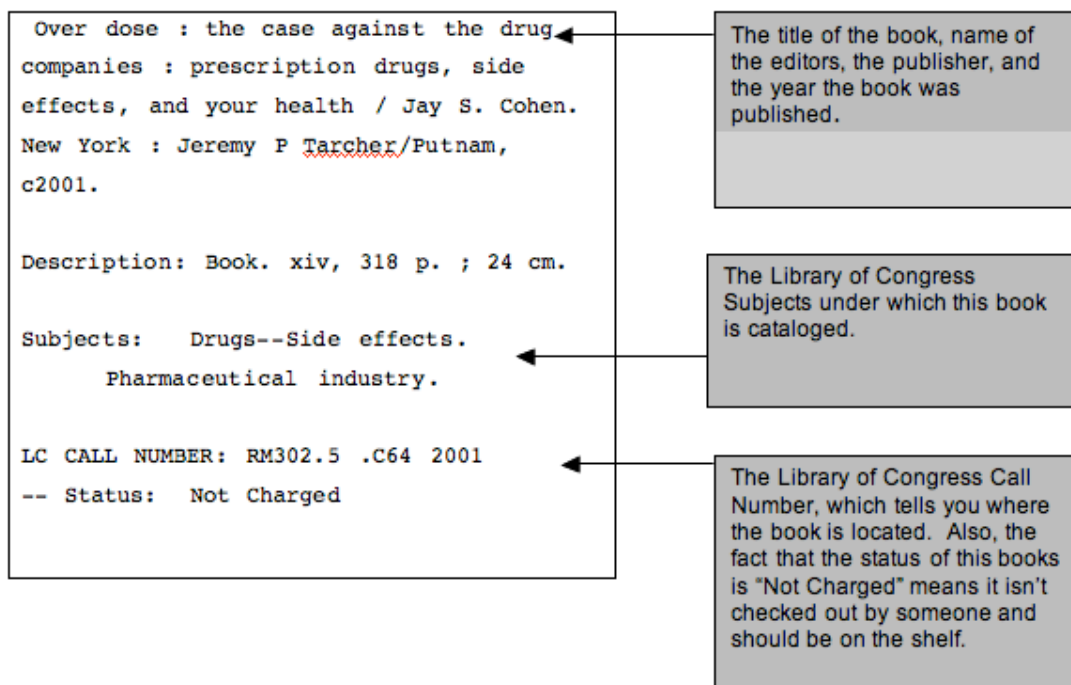
Call Number. Most academic library database systems will allow you to search for a book with a particular call number. However, this feature is probably only useful to you if you are trying to find out if your library has a specific book you want for your research.

When you are first searching for books on a research idea or topic at your library, you should begin with key word searches instead of author, title, or subject searches. However, once you find a book that you think will be useful in your research, you will want to note the different authors and subjects the book fits into and search those same categories.



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Here's an example of a book entry from a library computer database with the most important parts of the entry labeled:



The "Subjects" information might be particularly helpful for you to find other books and materials on your topic. For example, if you did a subject search for "Drugs- - Side effects," you would find this book plus other related books that might be useful in your research.

In most university libraries, to retrieve this book, you need to find it on one of the book shelves, or, as they are often known, the "stacks." This can be an intimidating process, especially if you aren't used to the large scale of many college and university libraries. But actually, finding a book on a shelf is no more complicated than finding a street address.

The Library of Congress Call Number—in this example, RM 302.5 .C64 2001—is essentially the "address" of that book within the library. To get to it, you will first want to find out where your library keeps the books. This might be very obvious in many libraries, and not at all obvious in others. When in doubt, check with a librarian.

The Library of Congress Call Number system works alphabetically and then numerically, so to find the book in our example, you need to find the shelf (or shelves) where the library keeps books that begin with the call letters "RM." Again, this will be very obvious in many libraries, and less obvious in others. At smaller academic libraries, finding the location of the "RM" books might be quite



easy. But at some large academic libraries, you might need to find out what floor or even what building houses books that begin with the call letters "RM."

If you were looking for the book in our example (or any other with a call number that began with "RM"), you can expect it to be somewhere between where they keep books that begin with the call letters "RL" and "RN." Once you find where the "RM"s are, you'll need to find the next number, 302.5. Again, this will be on the shelf numerically, somewhere between books with a call number that begins with "RM 302.4" and "RM 302.6." By the time you get to this point, you are getting close. Then you'll want to locate the ".C64" part, which will be between ".C63" and ".C65," then the next ".D7", and then finally the 2001.

If you go to the shelf and are not able to locate the book, there are three possible explanations: either the book is actually checked out, you have made a mistake in looking the book up, or the library has made a mistake in cataloging or shelving the book. It's very easy to make a mistake and to look for a book in the wrong place, so first double-check yourself. However, libraries do make mistakes either by mis-shelving an item or by not recording that it has been checked out. If you are sure you're right and you think the library has made a mistake, ask a librarian for help.

One last tip: when you find the book you are looking for, take a moment to scan the other books on the shelf near it. Under the Library of Congress system, books about similar subjects tend to be shelved near each other. You can often find extremely interesting and useful books by looking around on the shelf like this.

Journals, Magazines, and Newspapers

Libraries group journals, magazines, and newspapers into a category called "periodicals," which, as the name implies, are items in a series that are published "periodically." Periodicals include academic periodicals that are perhaps published only a few times a year, quarterly and monthly journals, or weekly popular magazines. Newspapers are also considered periodicals.

Periodical Indexes

Your key resource for finding articles in periodic materials for your research project will be some combination of the many different indexes that are available. There are hundreds of different indexing tools, so be sure to ask the librarians at your library about what resources are available to you.

Many indexes are quite broad in their scope—*The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and the online resources *ArticleFirst* and *WilsonSelect* are common examples—while others are quite specific, like *The Modern Language Association Bibliography* (which covers fields like English, Composition and Rhetoric, and Culture Studies, not to mention studies in other languages) and *ABI/INFORM* (which indexes materials that have to do with business and management).



It is *crucial* that you examine different indexes as you conduct your research: different indexes will lead you to different articles that are relevant for your research idea or topic.

While indexes frequently overlap with each other, using different indexes will give you a wider variety of results. Some library computer systems make this easy to do by allowing you to search multiple indexes at the same time. However, not all libraries have this capability and not all indexes will allow for these kinds of searches.

Most periodical indexes have gone the way of the card catalog and are now available electronically. How these electronic databases work varies, but typically patrons can search by keyword or author, and sometimes by subject (though "subject" in these online databases isn't necessarily as strict as the "subject" used in the Library of Congress system). A few indexes are still only available in "paper" form and these tend to be kept in library reference areas.



Database interfaces: differences and similarities

As I’ve mentioned previously, there are too many differences between library databases to provide too many details about how to use them in this chapter. You may have already noticed this in your own experiences with databases in your library.

Some of these differences can be rather confusing. For example, a “subject search” for a book in a database that uses the Library of Congress cataloging system is not at all the same as a “subject search” with a periodical database like WilsonSelect.

This is the search screen of the “FirstSearch” database system. While this particular example is of the MLA database, all of the databases supported by FirstSearch use a similar search screen. However, different database systems will have different search screens with different options and commands.

Fortunately, there are two common features with just about any library search software tool that will aid you in your research:

- **Author** searches, which almost always works the same in different databases; and
- **Keyword** searches. Keyword searches usually allow for different Boolean search functions. In some databases, you need to indicate that you are searching for a phrase. This is often done with putting quotes around a phrase: “space shuttle” will find just that phrase; without quotes, it will find all occurrences of the keywords space and shuttle. Some keyword searches also allow a “not” function. For example, shuttle NOT space would exclude keyword references to the space shuttle. Boolean searches also usually allow for “and/or” searches: “Hillary and/or Bill Clinton” would return information about Hillary Clinton, Bill Clinton, and information that was about both Hillary and Bill Clinton.



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Indexes typically provide the key information a reader needs to make some judgment about a periodical article and the information about where to actually find the article: the title of the publication, the title of the article, the name of the author, the date of publication, and the page numbers where the article appears. Sometimes, indexes also provide abstracts, which are brief summaries of the article that can also let readers know if it is something they are interested in reading.

Here is an example of a typical entry from a periodical index resource; specifically, this example is a portion of an entry from the online database Wilson Select Plus:

<pre>Database: <u>WilsonSelectPlus</u> Ownership: Check the catalogs in your library. Search the catalog at EMU Bruce T. <u>Halle</u> Library Full Text: View HTML Full Text (<u>WilsonSelectPlus</u>) Author(s): Nelson, Nancy L. Title: International concern for the sustainability of the world's fisheries: United Nations efforts to combat over- fishing and international debate over state fishing subsidies. Source: Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law & Policy v. 1999 (2000) p. 157-63 SUBJECT(S) Fishing (International law). Sustainable development. Subsidies.</pre>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>The name of the database and information about availability. The "full text" of the article is available online.</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Key citation information: authors, article title, title of publication, date published, page numbers.</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>The article subjects. Doing a "subject search" in this database with these subjects would lead you to articles similar to this one.</p> </div>
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Accessing an Article

To find the article, you first have to determine if your library has the particular periodical. This is a key step because **just because an item is listed in an index you have available to you in your library doesn't mean that your library subscribes to that particular periodical**. If you know it is an article that is critical to your research and it is in a periodical your library doesn't carry, you might want to discuss your options with a librarian. You still might be able to get access to the article, but you will probably have to wait several days or even weeks to get it, and your library might charge you a fee.

The process of how to find out if your library subscribes to a particular periodical varies from library to library. At many libraries, you can learn whether or not a particular periodical is available by doing a "title" search of the library's main electronic catalog. At other libraries, you have to conduct a search with a different electronic database.

You will also want to figure out whether or not the article you are looking for appears in a more current issue of the periodical. Most libraries keep the current



magazines, journals, and newspapers in a reading room of some sort that is separate from where they keep older issues of periodicals. What counts as "current" depends on the periodical and your particular library's practices. For daily newspapers, libraries might only make a few weeks of the current editions available, while they might consider all of a year's worth of a journal that is only published three or four times a year as current.

If your library does carry the particular periodical publication where the article appears, your next step is to figure out *how* the library carries the item. Unlike books, libraries store periodical materials in several different ways. Ask your librarian how you can find out how your library stores particular periodicals, though this information is usually provided to you when you find out if your library carries the periodical in the first place.

Bound periodicals. Most libraries have shelves where they keep bound periodicals, which are groups of individual issues of a periodical that are bound together into book form. Individual issues of a magazine or journal (usually a year's worth) are made into one large book with the title of the periodical and the volume or year of editions of the periodical printed in bold letters on the spine of the book.

Microfilm/microfiche. Libraries also store periodicals by converting them to either microfilm or microfiche because it takes much less room to store these materials. Newspapers are almost always stored in one of these two formats or online. Microfilms are rolls of film where a black-and-white duplicate of the periodical publication appears, page for page as it appeared in the original. Microfiche are small sheets of film with black-and-white duplications of the original. To read these materials, library patrons must use special machinery that projects the images of the periodical pages onto a screen. Check with a librarian in your library about how to read and make copies of articles that are stored on microfilm or microfiche.

Electronic periodicals. Most college and university libraries also make periodicals available electronically through a particular database. These articles are often available as just text, which means any illustrations, charts, or photographs that might have accompanied the article as it was originally published won't be included. However, some online databases are beginning to provide articles in a format called "Portable Document File" (PDF), which electronically reproduces the article as it originally appeared in the periodical.

Periodicals from Electronic Databases

The example of an entry from a periodical database, "International concern for the sustainability of the world's fisheries," is an example of one where the full text of the article is available online through the library's database. This example also demonstrates how the differences between "the library" and "the Internet" can be confusing. Periodical articles available online, but originally published in a more traditional journal, magazine, or newspaper, are considered "library" and not "Internet" evidence.



For example, I was able to read the article, which appeared in *The Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law & Policy*, even though my library doesn't subscribe to the paper version of this journal, because I was able to read it electronically with the WilsonSelect database. But even though I was only able to read an electronic version of this article delivered to me via a library database accessed through the World Wide Web, I still consider this article as a "periodical" or "library" source.

☛ **Hyperlink:** For guidelines for properly citing research materials you find as "complete text" in online databases, see "Citing Your Researching Using MLA or APA Style."

Some Final Tips

Photocopy or print out your articles. Most academic libraries won't let you check out periodicals. This means you either have to read and take your notes on the article while in the library, you have to make a photocopy of the article, or, if it is available electronically, you have to print it out. It might cost you a dollar or two and take a few minutes at a photocopier or a printer, but it will be worth it because you'll be able to return to the article later on when you're actually doing your writing.

Write down all the citation information before you leave the library. When you start using the evidence you find in journals, magazines, and newspapers to support your points in your research writing projects, you will need to give your evidence credit.

The key pieces of information to note about your evidence before you leave the library include:

- the type of periodical (a journal, a magazine, or a newspaper)
- the title of the publication
- the author or authors of the article
- the title of the article
- the date of the publication
- the page numbers of the article

Recording all of this information does take a little time, but it is much easier to record that information when you first find the evidence than it is to try to figure it out later on.

☛ **Hyperlink:** Chapter Six, "The Annotated Bibliography Exercise," describes the process of keeping track of the research materials you find in the library and on the Internet in a writing project.

Other Library Materials

Chances are, the bulk of your library research will involve books and periodicals. But libraries have many other types of materials that you might find useful for



your research projects as well. Here are some examples and brief explanations of these materials.

Government Documents. Most college and university libraries in this country collect materials published by the United States federal government. Given the fact that the U.S. government releases more publications than any other organization in the world, the variety of materials commonly called "government documents" is quite broad. They include transcripts of congressional hearings and committee meetings; reports from almost every government office, agency and bureau; and pamphlets, newsletters, and periodic publications from various government sponsored institutes and associations. If your research project is about any issue involving an existing or proposed federal law, a government reform or policy, a foreign policy, or an issue on which the U.S. Congress held hearings about, chances are the federal government has published something about it.

Check with your librarian about the government documents available and how to search them. Most of the materials published by the U.S. government can be researched using the same databases you use to search for periodicals and books.

Interlibrary Loan. Most college and university libraries provide their patrons ways to borrow materials from other libraries. The nature of this service, usually called *interlibrary loan*, varies considerably. Many community college, college, and university libraries in the U.S. have formed partnerships with other libraries in their geographic areas to make interlibrary loan of books and even periodicals quite easy and convenient. On the other hand, many other libraries treat each interlibrary request as a special case, which means it frequently isn't as easy or as quick.

Theses and dissertations. If your college or university has graduate programs, your library probably has a collection of the theses or dissertations written by these graduate students. These documents are usually shelved in a special place in the library, though at most libraries, you would use the same database you used to find books to find a thesis or a dissertation.

Rare books and other special collections. Many college and university libraries have collections of unusual and often valuable materials that they hold as part of a special collection. Most of these special collections consist of materials that can be loosely classified as rare books: books, manuscripts, and other publications that are valuable because of their age, their uniqueness, the fame of the author, and so forth. Your research project probably won't require you to use these unusual collections, but rare book and other special collection portions of the library can be fun to visit.

Researching on the Internet

The great advantage of the Internet is it is a fast and convenient way to get information on almost anything. It has revolutionized how all academics conduct



research and practice writing. However, while the Internet is a tremendous research resource, **you are still more likely to find detailed, accurate, and more credible information in the library than on the Web.** Books and journals are increasingly becoming available online, but most are still only available in libraries. This is particularly true of academic publications. You also have a much better chance of finding credible and accurate information in the library than on the Internet.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See the sections “The Internet: The Researcher’s Wild Card” and “Evaluating the quality and credibility of your research” in Chapter One, “Thinking Critically About Research.”

It is easy to imagine a time when most academic journals and even academic books will be available only electronically. But for the time-being, you should view the library and the Internet as tools that work together and that play off of each other in the process of research. Library research will give you ideas for searches to conduct on the Internet, and Internet research will often lead you back to the more traditional print materials housed in your library.

Email

Electronic mail (“email”) is the basic tool that allows you to send messages to other people who have access to the Internet, regardless of where they physically might be. Email is extremely popular because it’s easy, quick, and cheap—free, as long as you aren’t paying for Internet access. Most email programs allow you to attach other documents like word processed documents, photos, or clips of music to your messages as well.

For the purposes of research writing, email can be a useful tool in several different ways.

You can use email to communicate with your teacher and classmates about your research projects—asking questions, exchanging drafts of essays, and so forth. Many teachers use email to provide comments and feedback on student work, to facilitate peer review and collaboration, or to make announcements.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See Chapter Four, “How to Collaborate and Write With Others.”

Depending on the subject of your research project, you can use email to conduct interviews or surveys. Of course, the credibility of an email interview (like more traditional phone or “face to face” interviews) is based entirely on the credibility of whom you interview and the extent to which you can trust that the person you think you are communicating with via email really is that person. But since email is a format that has international reach and is convenient to use, you may find experts who would be unlikely to commit to a phone or “face to face” interview who might be willing to answer a few questions via email.



You can join an electronic mailing list, or listserv, to learn more about your topic and to post questions and observations. With the use of various email software, an emailing list works by sending email messages to a group of people known as "subscribers." Email lists are usually organized around a certain topic or issue of interest: movies, writing, biology, politics, or current events. Before posting a question or quoting messages from the mailing list, be sure to review that lists' guidelines for posting.

Many different sorts of groups and organizations maintain mailing lists that you will be able to find most easily by finding Web-based information about that group through a Web search.

A Word about Netiquette

Netiquette is simply the concept of courtesy and politeness when working on the Internet. The common sense "golden rule" of every day life—"do unto others as you would want them to do to you"—is the main rule to keep in mind online as well.

But there are two reasons why practicing good netiquette in discussion forums like email, newsgroups, and chat rooms is more difficult than practicing good etiquette in real life. First, many people new to the Internet and its discussion forums aren't aware that there are differences between how one behaves online versus how to behave in real life. Folks new to the Internet in general or to a specific online community in particular (sometimes referred to as **newbies**) often are inadvertently rude or inconsiderate to others. It is a bit like traveling to a different country: if you are unfamiliar with the language and customs, it is easy to unintentionally do or not do something that is considered wrong or rude in that culture.

Second, the Internet is a volatile and potentially combative discussion space where people can find themselves offending or being offended by others quickly. The main reason for this is the Internet lacks the visual cues of "face to face" communication or the oral cues of a phone conversation. We convey a lot of information with the tone of our voice, our facial expression, or hand gestures. A simple question like "Are you serious?" can take on many different meanings depending on how you emphasize the words, whether or not you are smiling or frowning, whether or not you say it in a laughing tone or a loud and angry tone, or whether or not you are raising your hand or pointing a finger at the speaker.

The lack of visual or oral cues is also a problem with writing, of course, but online writing tends to be much more like speaking than more traditional forms of writing because it is usually briefer and much quicker in transmission. It's difficult to imagine a heated argument that turns into name calling happening between two people writing letters back and forth, but it is not at all difficult to imagine (or experience!) an argument that arose out of some sort of



miscommunication with the use of email messages that travel from writers to readers in mere seconds.

This phenomenon of the Internet making it possible for tempers to rise quickly and for innocent conversations to lead to angry arguments even has a name: **flaming**. An ongoing and particularly angry argument that takes place in a newsgroup or emailing list forum is called a "**flame war**." Flames (like conventional "fighting words") often are the result of intentional rudeness, but they are also the result of simple miscommunications.

Here are some basic guidelines for practicing good netiquette:

Use "common sense courtesy." Always remember that real people are on the other side of the email or newsgroup message you are responding to or asking about. As such, remember to try and treat people as you would want them to treat you.

Don't type in all capital letters. "All caps" is considered shouting on the Internet. Unless you mean to shout something, don't do this.

Look for, ask for, and read discussion group FAQs. Many discussion groups have a "Frequently Asked Questions" document for their members. Before posting to an Internet group, try to read this document to get an idea about what is or isn't discussed in the forum.

Read some of the messages before posting to your electronic group. Make sure you have a sense of the tone and type of conversation that takes place in the forum before posting a message of your own.

Do not send advertisements, chain letters, or personal messages to a discussion group.

Ask permission to quote from others on the list. If someone writes something in a newsgroup or an emailing list discussion forum you think might be useful to quote in your research project, send a private email to the author of the post and ask for permission. Along these lines, do not post copyrighted material to the Internet without getting permission from the holder of the copyright to do so.

- ***Make sure your email messages and other discussion forum posts have subjects.*** Keep the subject line brief and to the point, but be sure to include it. If your message is part of an ongoing conversation, make sure your subject is the same as the other subject lines in the conversation.



Sidebar: Be on the look out for new technologies!

One of the challenges I face in offering advice on how to use the Internet for your research is that the tools available on the Internet keep changing at an extremely rapid rate. New and exciting technologies are emerging all the time, and many of them become popular in an amazingly short period of time. Conversely, older Internet tools (Telnet, Gopher, newsgroups, etc.) are more fitting in a history of the Internet textbook than this one.

Here's just a partial list of emerging technologies you might be using for Internet research in the near future (if you're not using them already):

- **Blogs.** A blog (or "web log") is a web-based publication of articles, usually dated and published with the most current entries first. Many blogs are very similar to a personal journal or diary, though other blogs are maintained collaboratively and by academic or professional writers. Two of the most popular services are Blogger <<http://www.blogger.com>> and Xanga <<http://www.xanga.com>>.
- **Podcasting.** A "podcast" is a way of publishing sound files and making them available for others to listen to over the Internet. Despite its name, you don't actually have to have an iPod to listen to a podcast, just a computer that can play MP3 sound files. Similar to blogs, podcasts range from individual broadcasts about virtually anything on their minds to news organizations producing professional shows. See iPodder.org <<http://www.ipodder.org>> to get started.
- **Instant Messaging.** My experience has been that most of my students are more familiar with IM than most of my fellow faculty members. Instant messaging allows users to chat with each other in real time. Most cell phones support IM-ing, too, called text messaging (?). Two of the most popular IM software tools are America Online's Instant Messenger <<http://www.aim.com>> and Yahoo! Messenger <<http://messenger.yahoo.com>>
- **Peer-to-Peer file sharing.** "Peer-to-peer" sharing is a technology that allows users on a network to share files with each other. Usually, this is associated with music sharing, and it has been controversial because of the possibility of illegally copying music files.
- **Scholarly Publishing online.** There are currently significant differences between the materials available on the Internet and in an academic library. Obviously, libraries have books and the Internet doesn't. But that might be changing sooner than you might think. For example, Google is working with several academic libraries around the world to scan their books into their database. (See <http://www.google.com/press/pressrel/print_library.html>). More and more periodicals are making their articles available electronically, both via "full text" databases like WilsonSelect.



The World Wide Web

Chances are, the World Wide Web will be your most valuable Internet research tool. While you can go to literally billions of different "pages" or sites on the Web that might be useful for your research, finding them can be a bit like finding a needle in a haystack. This is one of the major drawbacks of the World Wide Web. Unlike the library, where the materials are strictly organized, cataloged, and cared for, the Web is more of a jumble of files that can be difficult to find or that are missing altogether.

Fortunately, you can turn to several resources to aid in your World Wide Web research: search engines, meta-search engines, and Web directories.

Search engines are software-driven Web sites that allow users to search by entering in a word, a phrase, or even another Web site address. Search engines are "for profit" enterprises which come and go in the fast-paced world of the Internet.

By far, the most popular search engine currently is Google <<http://www.google.com>>. There are other search engines of course, notably AltaVista <<http://www.altavista.com>>, and Teoma <<http://www.teoma.com>>. But Google is so popular it has become synonymous for most users for "search engine" and is even used as a verb, as in "Where was George Washington born? I guess I'd better google that."

Most search engines look deceptively simple: enter in a few words into the window, hit return, and you're provided thousands of hits. However, it is somewhat more complicated than that. For one thing, search engines make money by advertising and listing those sponsors first-- Google and other search engines note that these are "Sponsored Links." For another, search engine searches are conducted by machines. Unlike a library catalog, which is created by people, search engine databases are created and searched through by powerful software that constantly scans the ever-growing World Wide Web for sites to include in its database. Software can catalog materials faster than people, but it cannot prioritize or sort the material as precisely as people. As a result, a search engine search will frequently return tens of thousands of matches, most of which have little relevance to you.

☛ **Hyperlink:** Search engines are also a great resource when you are first trying to develop a research topic. See the "Brainstorming with Computers" section of Chapter 5, "The Working Thesis Exercise."

But to get the most out of a search engine search, you have to "search smart." Typing in a word or a phrase into any search engine will return results, but you have a much better chance of getting better results if you take the time to conduct a good search engine search.



Read through the "advanced search" tips or "help" documents. All of the major search engines provide information about conducting advanced searches, which you should read for at least two reasons. First, the advanced search tips or help documents explain the specific rules for conducting more detailed searches with that particular search engine. Different search engines are similar, but not identical. Some search engines will allow a search for a word root or truncation—in other words, if you type in a word with an asterisk in some search engines ("bank*" for example), you will do a search for other forms of the word (banks, banker, banking, etc.). Some search engines don't allow for this feature.

Second, many search engines have features that you wouldn't know about unless you examined the advanced search or help documents.



The Process of Research Writing
Chapter Two, "Understanding and Using the Library
and the Internet for Research," 21

If you click on the "Advanced Search" option on the Google homepage, you are taken to this page that offers a variety of ways to refine your search. For example you can search for an exact phrase, for "at least one word" in a phrase, and for pages that do not contain a particular phrase.

Use different search engines. Each search engine compiles its data a bit differently, which means that you won't get identical results from all search engines. Just as you should use different indexing tools when doing library periodical research, using different search engines is a good idea.

Try using as many different synonyms and related terms for your search as possible. For example, instead of using only the term "Drug advertising" in your search, try using "pharmaceutical advertising," "prescription drug promotions," "television and prescription drugs," and so forth.

This is extremely important because there is no systematic way to categorize and catalog information similar to the way it is done in libraries. As a result, there is no such thing as a "subject" search on a search engine, certainly not in the way you can search subjects with the Library of Congress system. Some Web sites might refer to drunk driving as "drunk driving," while other Web sites might refer to drunk driving as "driving while intoxicated."



Take your time and look past the first page of your search results. If you do a search for "drug advertising" with a search engine, you will get thousands of matches. Most search engines organize the results so that the pages that are most likely to be useful in your search will appear first. However, it is definitely worthwhile to page through several pages of results. Search engines like Google support basic Boolean search commands (and, and/or, not, etc.), and a lot of other even more sophisticated commands. For example, Google allows you to search for synonyms for a term by typing "~" in front of it. For example, the search "~corporal punishment" also returns information about web sites that use the synonym "spanking."

Metasearch Engines are similar to search engines, except they are software-driven Web sites that search other search engines. The difference is that when you do a search with a search engine like Google, you are searching only through Google's database; when you use a metasearch engine, you are searching through Google's database along with other search engine databases. Simply put, metasearch engines allow you to search through many different databases at the same time.

Like search engines, metasearch engines are commercial services and they come and go depending on their business successes and failures. Currently, two of the more popular of these services are AlltheWeb.com
<<http://www.alltheweb.com>> and Dogpile <<http://dogpile.com>>.

Metasearch engines might seem to have an obvious advantage over regular search engines, but in practice, this is not necessarily the case. For one thing, metasearch engines don't account for the different rules of different search engines very well—in other words, they will apply the same "rules" for a search to all of the search engines they are searching, regardless of how those rules might apply. For another thing, different search engines have different rules as to what results they rank as most important. Again, this is something that most metasearch engines don't account for very well in their results.

In other words, right now, metasearch engines don't usually work as well as using several different search engines independently. When I conduct search engine research on the World Wide Web, I prefer to visit several different search engines than one metasearch engine.

If you do decide to use metasearches, keep in mind that the "tips" provided for search engines apply to these devices as well. To do a "smart search" with a metasearch engine, be sure to read the "advanced search," "search tips," or "help" document, be sure to use different synonyms for the key words you are using to search, and be sure to look past the first page of results.

Web Directories

Web Directories look like search engines, and many of them include a search engine component. But Web directories are different from search engines



because they are collections of data about Web sites that are categorized by people and not computer programs.

The most famous web directory is Yahoo! <<http://www.yahoo.com>>, which was started in 1994 by two graduate students at Stanford, David Filo and Jerry Yang. But there are many other Web directory sites, including the following:

- **About** <<http://about.com>>
- **The WWW Virtual Library** <<http://vlib.org/>>
- **Librarian's Index to the Internet** <<http://lii.org/>>

In a sense, Web directories are more like library databases: they are organized by people into logical categories, and the organizers of Web directories make some choices as to what they will and won't include in their directories and about how they will categorize different items. However, each search engine makes up its own system for categorizing data; there is no "standardized" system of subjects like there is with the Library of Congress system. This means that while Web directories are "more organized" than what you might find with a search engine, they are probably "less organized" than what you might find in the library with a book or periodical database.

Web directory searches will often return higher quality Web sites because what is and isn't included in these directories is decided by people and not computer software. Further, some of these Web directories, like the "Librarian's Index to the Internet," are quite a bit more selective and specialized. Conversely, Web directories don't usually give you the "quantity" of information that you are likely to receive from search engines or metasearch engines.

In general, the best advice for working with Web directories is very similar to the best advice for working with search engines: be sure to read the instructions on conducting advance searches, use more than one Web directory, and use synonyms for your key terms. Use search engines, metasearch engines, and Web directories in conjunction with each other: the "computer software" based searches you do with search and metasearch engines can help you refine the searches you conduct with the help of Web directories.



"Dos" and "Don'ts" of Research on the Web

- **Do** use synonyms in your keyword searches (for example, "drugs" and "pharmaceuticals").
- **Do** use multiple search engines and directories.
- **Do** read the "advanced search" documents.
- **Do** your searches over a period of time.
- **Do** remember that because anyone can create a Web site, you need to evaluate the credibility of web sources very carefully.
- **Don't** stop at just search engines; use directory searches, too
- **Don't** forget there is no organized subject search on the Web that is like the subject search in a library.
- **Don't** stop at the first page of search results; look through more than the first few hits.



Chapter Five

The Working Thesis Exercise

- Working with Assigned Topics
- Coming Up with Your Own Idea
- Brainstorming for Ideas
- Brainstorming with Computers
- Moving From Ideas to Topics with the Help of the Library and the World Wide Web
- Writing Your Working Thesis
- Assignment: Writing The Working Thesis
 - * A Sample Assignment
 - * Questions to Consider with a First Draft
 - * Review and Revision
 - * A Student Example: “Preventing Drunk Driving by Enforcement” by Daniel Marvins

This chapter is about finding something to write about in the first place. As I suggested earlier in the introduction and in Chapter 1, “Thinking Critically About Research,” the process of finding something to write about is complicated. In many ways, you need to think critically about the idea of research, you need to go to the library or the internet and conduct research, and you need to formulate a question or thesis to research all at the same time.

Sometimes, the subject of your research is called a “research question” or “problem statement.” I’ve decided to call this process “the working thesis” exercise to emphasize the idea that embarking on a research writing project involves making “a point” that is also a continually revised “work” in progress. A working thesis is tentative in that it will inevitably change as you go through the process of writing and researching. But if you’re more comfortable thinking of the starting point of your research project as being about asking the right questions or finding the right problem, that’s okay too.

Working With Assigned Topics

Many times, starting an academic writing assignment is easy: you write about the topic as assigned by the instructor. Of course, it is never a good idea to simply repeat what the instructor says about a particular topic. But in many college classes, the topic of your writing projects will be determined by the subject matter of the class and the directions of the instructor. If you are required to write a research paper for your political science class that focuses on the effects of nationalism, chances are an essay on the relaxation benefits of trout fishing would not be welcomed.



So, how do you write about topics assigned by the instructor? The answer to this question depends on the specific assignment and the class, but here are a few questions you should ask yourself and your instructor as you begin to write:

- ***What is the purpose and who is the audience for the essay you are being asked to write?*** In other words, what do you understand to be the instructor's and your goals in writing? Is the instructor's assignment designed to test your understanding and comprehension of class lectures, discussions, and readings? Is the instructor asking you to reflect and argue about some aspect of the class activities? Is the intended audience for the essay only the instructor, or is the assignment more broadly directed to other students or to a "general reader"?
- ***What do you think about the topic?*** What's your opinion about the topic assigned by the instructor? If it is a topic that asks you to pick a particular "side," what side are you on? And along these lines: to what extent would it be appropriate for you to incorporate your own feelings and opinions about the topic into your writing?
- ***How much "room" is there within the assigned topic for more specialized focuses?*** Most assigned topics which at first appear limiting actually allow for a great deal of flexibility. For example, you might think that an assigned topic about the "fuel economy and SUVs" would have little room for a variety of approaches. But the many books and articles about fuel efficient vehicles suggest the topic is actually much larger than it might at first appear.
- ***Does the assignment ask students to do additional research, or does it ask students to focus on the readings assigned in class?*** Assignments that ask students to do additional library and Internet research are potentially much broader than assignments that ask students to focus on class readings.

Coming up with your own idea

At other times, instructors allow students to pick a topic for their research-based writing projects. However, rarely do instructors allow their students to write research-based essays on *anything* for a lot of good reasons. For example, your composition and rhetoric course might be structured around a particular theme that you are exploring with your other reading assignments, your discussions, and your writing. Other ideas and topics don't really lend themselves to academic research writing. You probably have a special person in your life worth writing about (a parent, a grandparent, a boyfriend or girlfriend, etc.), but it is usually difficult to write a research-based essay on such a person. Some potential topics are too divisive or complex to write about in a



relatively short academic research-based essay, or some are topics that have become so overly-discussed that they have become clichés.

Besides the general theme of the course and other potential limitations to ideas for research, you also need to carefully consider your *own* interests in the ideas you are thinking about researching.

If you are allowed to choose your own research project topic, *be sure to chose carefully, especially if it is a topic you will be working with throughout the term.* Don't pick a topic simply because it is the first idea that comes to mind or because you imagine it will be "easy" to research. Focus instead on an idea that meets the goals of the assignment, is researchable, and, most importantly, is a topic that you are interested in learning more about.

Taking the time to develop a good research topic *at the beginning* of the research writing process is critical. Planning ahead can be difficult and time-consuming, and it can be tempting to seize on the first idea that seems "easy." But all too often, these "easy" first ideas end up being time-consuming and difficult projects. In other words, the time you spend turning your research idea into a topic and then a working thesis will pay off when it comes time to actually write the research project assignment.

Exercise 5.1

- **What are some ideas that would NOT make good research projects for this class? Working in small groups, try to come up with a list of items that you all agree would be difficult (if not impossible) to write a research project about for this class.**
- **Are there items that you can add to your list of topics that would NOT make good research projects, ones that are "researchable" but that seem too cliched or controversial to do effectively in one semester?**

Brainstorming for Ideas

Whether you are assigned a particular topic or are allowed to choose your own topic within certain guidelines, the next step is to explore the ideas that you might write about in more detail. This process is called "brainstorming," though some instructors and textbooks might refer to similar techniques as "invention" or "pre-writing." Regardless of what it's called, the goal is the same: to lay the foundation for focusing in on a particular topic and the working thesis of a research-writing project.

I recommend you keep three general concepts in mind when trying any approach to brainstorming with your writing:



- ***Not all of these approaches to brainstorming will work equally well for everyone or work equally well for all topics.*** Your results will vary and that's okay. If one of these techniques doesn't work for you, try another and see how that goes.
- ***When trying any of these techniques, you can't censor yourself.*** Allow yourself the freedom to brainstorm about some things that you think are bad or even silly ideas. Getting out the "bad" or "silly" ideas has a way of allowing the good ideas to come through. Besides, you might be surprised about how some topics that initially seem bad or silly turn out to actually be good with a little brainstorming.
- ***Even if you know what topic you want to write about, brainstorm.*** Even if you know you want to write about a particular topic, you should try to consider some other topics in brainstorming because you never know what other things you could have written about if you don't consider the possibilities. Besides, you still should do some brainstorming to shape your idea into a topic and then focus it into a working thesis.

Freewriting

One of the most common and effective brainstorming techniques for writing classes, freewriting, is also easy to master. All you do is write about anything that comes into your head without stopping for a short time—five minutes or so. The key part of this activity though is **you cannot stop for any reason!** Even if you don't know what to write about, write "I don't know what to write about" until something else comes to mind. And don't worry—something else usually does come to mind.

Looping or Targeted Freewriting

Looping is similar to freewriting in that you write without stopping, but the difference is you are trying to be more focused in your writing. You can use a more specific topic to "loop" back to if you would like, or, if you do the more open-ended freewriting first, you can do a more targeted freewriting about one of the things you found to be a potentially workable idea. For example, you might freewrite with something general and abstract in mind, perhaps the question "what would make a good idea for a research project?" For a more targeted freewriting exercise, you would consider a more specific questions, such as "How could I explore and write about the research idea I have on computer crime?"

Group Idea Bouncing

One of the best ways we all get different ideas is to talk with others. The same is true for finding a topic for research: sometimes, "bouncing" ideas off of each other in small groups is a great place to start, and it can be a lot of fun.

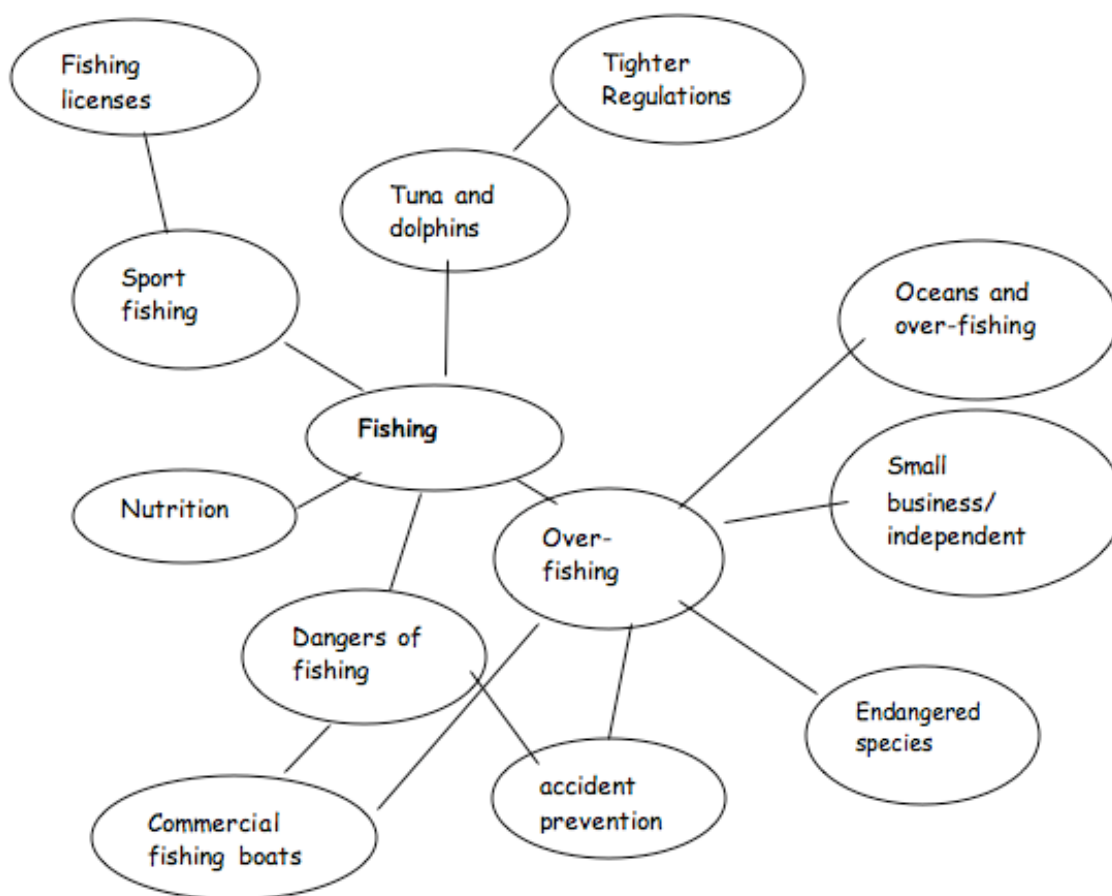
Here's one way to do it: name someone in a small group as the recorder. Each person in turn should give an idea for a potential topic, and the recorder should write it down.



Every person should take a turn quickly “bouncing” an idea out for the others—no “I don’t know” or “come back to me!” Remember: no ideas are bad or silly or stupid at this point, so do not censor yourself or your group members.

Clustering

Clustering is a visual technique that can often help people see several different angles on their ideas. It can be an especially effective way to explore the details of a topic idea you develop with freewriting or looping. On a blank sheet of paper, write a one or two word description of your idea in the middle and circle it. Around that circle, write down one or two word descriptions of different aspects or characteristics of your main idea. Draw circles around those terms and then connect them to the main idea. Keep building outward, making “clusters” of the main idea as you go. Eventually, you should get a grouping of clusters that looks something like the illustration below.



Journalist Questions

One of the key elements of journalistic style is that journalists answer the basic questions of “What?” “Who?” “Where?” “When?” “How?” and “Why?” These are all good questions to consider in brainstorming for your idea, though clearly, these



questions are not always equally applicable to all ideas. Here are some examples of the sort of journalistic questions you might want to ask yourself about your idea:

- What is my idea? What are the key terms of my idea?
- Who are the people involved in my idea? Who is performing the action of my topic? Who are the people affected by my idea?
- Where does my idea take place? Where did it come from? Is it restricted to a particular time and place?
- When did my idea happen? How does it relate to the other events that might have taken place at a similar time? Are there events that happened before or after my idea that might have effected it?
- How did my idea happen, or how is it still happening?
- Why did my idea happen, or why is it still happening?

Brainstorming with Computers

Computers are a great tool for fostering these and other collaborative brainstorming techniques. For example, group idea bouncing can be used effectively with Internet "chat rooms," with instant messaging software, or with local area network discussion tools.

You can also collaborate on your brainstorming activities with computers with little more than simple word processing or email; Here are three variations on a similar theme:

- **Email exchange:** This exercise is conducted as an exchange over email. Each person in a small group does a looping/targeted freewriting to discover ideas for things she is interested in doing more research about. Then, each person in the group can post his looping/targeted freewriting to all of the other members of the group simultaneously. Email also allows for members of the group to collaborate with each other while not being in the same place--after all, email messages can be sent over great distances--and not at the same time.
- **"Musical computers:"** This approach is similar to the previous two exercises, but instead of exchanging diskettes or email messages, members of a group of students exchange computer stations in a computer lab. Here's how it works: a group (up to an entire class of students) does a looping/targeted freewriting at a computer station for a set period of time. When time is up, everyone needs to find a different computer in the fashion of the children's game "musical chairs." Once at the new computer station, the new writer comments on the original freewriting exercise. The process can be repeated several times until everyone has had a chance to provide feedback on four or five different original freewritings.



Exercise 5.2

- By yourself, work with at least two of the brainstorming techniques described above or other brainstorming techniques described by your instructor.
- Working with others in a small group, work with at least two of the brainstorming techniques described above or other brainstorming techniques described by your instructor. For example, have all the members of the small group each complete their own freewriting or clustering activity on the topic of her choice. Then, compare results. How do each of you react to different exercises? Are some techniques more useful for some?

Moving From Ideas to Topics With the Help of the Library and the World Wide Web

Coming up with an idea, especially using these brainstorming techniques, is not that hard to do. After all, we are surrounded by potential ideas and things that could be researched: teen violence, computer crime, high-fat diets, drugs, copyright laws, Las Vegas, dangerous toys. But it can be a little more tricky to figure out how ideas can be more specific and researchable topics. Ideas are general, broad, and fairly easy for all of us to grasp. Topics, on the other hand, are more specific, narrow, and in need of research. For example:

"Idea"	"Topics"
Computer Crime	Terrorism and the 'net, credit card fraud, computer stalking, "helpful" hackers
High-fat diets	Health risks, obesity, cholesterol, heart disease, health benefits of, weight loss from
Pharmaceutical Drugs	Cost of prescriptions, medical advances, advertising, disease prevention

In other words, a topic is a step further in the process of coming up with a researchable project for academic writing.

Chances are, your brainstorming activities have already helped you in the process of developing your idea into a topic. But before you move onto the next step of developing a working thesis, you should consider two more helpful topic developing techniques: a quick library subject search and a Web engine search.



A quick library subject search is just what it sounds like: using the computerized catalog system for your library, you can get a sense about the sort of ways other researchers have already divided up your idea into different topics.

☛ **Hyperlink:** For guidelines and tips for using your library's computer system to conduct subject searches, see Chapter Two, "Understanding and Using the Library and the Internet for Research" and the section called "Finding Research in the Library: An Overview."

For example, imagine your brainstorming has led you to the general idea "fisheries" and the potential problem of over-fishing in some part of the world. While this seems like it might be a potentially good and interesting thing to write about and to research, "fisheries" is an idea that could be narrowed down. If you conduct a subject search on your library's book catalog for "fisheries," you might find the library keeps track of different books in several categories. Some examples of these categories include:

- Fisheries, Atlantic Ocean.
- Fisheries, Canada.
- Fisheries, Environmental Aspects.

You might also want to use your library's periodical databases for some quick keyword searches. For example, a keyword search for "computer crime" in a periodical database returns article titles like "Demands for coverage increase as cyber-terrorism risk is realized" and "Making sense of cyber-exposures" (which are both articles about the concern businesses and insurance companies have about cyber crime), and also articles like "Meet the Hackers," an insider's view of computer hacking that disputes it being a "crime." At this point in the research process, you don't need to look up and read the sources you find, though you will probably want to keep track of them in case you end up needing them later for your research project.

Another great place to go to brainstorm ideas into topics is one of the many search engines on the World Wide Web, and you are probably already familiar with these services such as Google, Yahoo!, or alltheweb.com.

☛ **Hyperlink:** For guidelines and tips for working with Web-based research, see the section "Finding Research on the Internet" in Chapter Two, "Understanding and Using the Library and the Internet for Research."

Like a quick library keyword search, doing a quick keyword search on the Web can give you some good direction about how to turn your idea into a topic. However, keep these issues in mind when conducting your Web searches:

- Search engine searches are done by computer programs, which means that they will not sort out for you what is "relevant" from what is "irrelevant" for your search.



- Most search engines and search directories offer an "advanced search" option that explains how to do a "smarter" search. Read these instructions and you will be on your way to better searches.
- Different search engines index and collect information in different ways. Therefore, you should do keyword searches with the same phrase with a few different search engines. You might be surprised how your results will differ.
- If you aren't having much luck with the keywords of your general idea, try a couple of synonyms. For example, with "computer crime," you might want to try "Internet crime," or a related term such as "computer hacking."

Exercise 5.3

With an idea in mind, try doing a quick keyword search on the library's computer system and on a World Wide Web Search Engine.

- What sort of differences are there in the information you get back from doing a quick keyword search at the library versus doing one on the Web?
- If you are having a hard time getting results with your searches, can you come up with any synonyms for your key words?

Writing a Working Thesis

The next step, developing a "working thesis," can be a difficult and time-consuming process. However, as was the case when considering different ideas for research in the first place, spending the time now on devising a good working thesis will pay off later.

For our purposes here (and for most college classes), **a thesis advocates a specific and debatable issue.** In academic writing (including the writing done by your professors), the thesis is often stated fairly directly in the first third or so of the writing, though not usually at the end of the first paragraph where students are often told to place it. The sentence or two that seems to encapsulate the issue of the essay is called a "thesis statement."

Frequently, theses are implied—that is, while the piece of writing clearly has a point that the reader understands, there may not be a specific sentence or two that can easily be identified as the "thesis statement." For example, theses are often implied in newspapers and magazines, along with a lot of the writing that appears on Web pages.

The point is a thesis is a point.

Theses are not statements of facts, simple questions, or summaries of events. They are positions that you as the writer take on and "defend" with evidence, logic, observations, and the other tools of discourse. Most kinds of writing—and particularly academic writing—have a thesis, directly stated or implied. Even most of the writing we largely think of as "informational" has a directly stated or implied thesis.



Theses also tend to lend a certain organization to written arguments since what you include (or exclude) in a written text is largely controlled by the thesis. The main goal of the thesis (either as a specific statement or as an implied statement) is to answer two key questions that are concerns of all readers: "what's your point?" and "why should I care?"

Now, a **working thesis** is more or less a *temporary* thesis you devise in the beginning of the research process in order to set some direction in your research. However, as I wrote in the beginning of this chapter, you should remember:

Your working thesis is temporary and should change as you research, write, and learn more about your topic.

Think of the working thesis as the scaffolding and bracing put up around buildings when they are under construction: these structures are not designed to forever be a part of the building. Just the opposite. But you couldn't build the building in the first place if you didn't have the scaffolding and bracing that you inevitably have to tear away from the finished building.

Here's another way of thinking of it: while the journey of 1000 miles begins with just one step (so the saying goes), you still have to pick some kind of direction in the beginning. That's the purpose of a working thesis. You might change your mind about the direction of your research as you progress through the process, but you've got to start somewhere.

What does a working thesis look like? Before considering some potentially "good" examples of working theses, read through these **BAD** examples of statements, ones that **ARE NOT** theses, at least for the purposes of academic writing:

- Computer crime is bad.
- Fisheries around the world are important.
- *The Great Gatsby* is an American novel.

None of these sentences would make effective theses because each of these is more or less a statement of fact. Of course, we could debate some of the details here. But practically speaking, most people would assume and believe these statements to be true. Because of that, these statements don't have much potential as working theses.

These statements **ARE NOT** really theses either:

- There are many controversial ways of dealing with computer crime.
- There are many things that could be done to preserve fisheries around the world.
- *The Great Gatsby* is a wonderful novel for several different reasons.



These revised working thesis statements are better than the previous examples, but they are not quite working theses yet. The problem with these possible working theses is that they are hopelessly vague and give no idea to the reader where the essay is going. Also, while these statements are a bit more debatable than the previous group of examples, they are still statements that most people would more or less accept as facts.

While this next group of statements is yet another step closer, these statements **ARE NOT** really good working theses either:

- This essay will be about the role computer hackers play in computer crime committed on the Internet.
- This essay will discuss some of the measures the international community should take in order to preserve fisheries around the world.
- My essay is about the relevance today of *The Great Gatsby's* depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream.

Each of these statements is close to being a working thesis because each is about an idea that has been focused into a specific topic. However, these statements are not quite working thesis statements because they don't offer a position or opinion that will be defended in some way. To turn these topics into working theses, the writer needs to take a side on the issues suggested in the statements.

Now, these revised statements **ARE** examples of possible working theses:

- While some computer hackers are harmless, most of them commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem.
- The international community should enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries and save endangered fish species around the world.
- *The Great Gatsby's* depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream is still relevant today.

If you compare these possible working theses with the statements at the beginning of this section, you will hopefully see the differences between the "bad" and "good" working theses, and hopefully you can see the characteristics of a viable working thesis.

Each of the "good" working thesis statements:

- takes a stand that is generally not considered a "fact;"
- is specific enough to give the writer and potential reader some idea as to the direction the writing will take; and
- offers an initial position on the topic that takes a stand.

Another useful characteristic of a good working thesis is that it can help you as writer to determine what your essay will **NOT** be about. For example, the phrasing of the



working thesis on computer hackers suggests to both the reader and the researcher that the essay will NOT be about the failure of "dot com" business, computer literacy, or computer software. Certainly these issues are *related* to the issue of computer hackers and computer crime, but these other issues will not become the *focus* of the essay.

Exercise 5.4

- Working with the topic you've chosen, create a working thesis similar to the above examples. Try to ensure that your working thesis is focused and to the point by keeping it to only one sentence. Creating a working thesis can be tricky, so be sure to devote some time to try out different possible working thesis statements. And don't forget: a working thesis is the temporary scaffolding that will help you build your essay. It will and should change in the process of writing, so it doesn't need to be "perfect" at this stage.
- After you have individually formed working theses, get together with a small group of classmates to share and revise them.



Assignment: Writing a Working Thesis Essay

The process of writing a working thesis essay can take many forms. Sometimes, topic proposals are formal essays written according to fairly strict guidelines and offering exhaustive detail. At other times, your writing about your topic might be more personal and brief in form. Here is an example of a working thesis essay assignment:

Write a brief narrative essay where you discuss the topic you have decided to research and write about. Tell your audience, your fellow classmates and your instructor how you arrived at this topic, some of the other ideas you considered in your brainstorming activities, and the working thesis you have settled on for the start of your project. Also, be sure to let us know about some of the initial library research you have conducted.

Questions to consider as you write your first draft

- Is the research topic one assigned by the instructor? Is it focused on a specific group of texts, questions, or ideas that have to do with a specific class?
- Are you expected to come up with your own idea for research? Since it is unlikely you will be able to write about just anything, what are some of the guidelines given to you by your instructor for what you can and can't write about?
- What are some of the ideas for research that you rejected as possibilities? Why did you reject some of these ideas?
- What ideas did you decide to brainstorm about? **Remember!** Be sure to brainstorm about more than one idea! What brainstorming techniques did you use to explore these ideas? Which ones seemed to work the best?
- What are some of the research topics that make up your research idea? In other words, when you begin to narrow your idea into different topics, what are some of the different research topics that interest you?
- What results did you get from a quick library keyword search? Be sure the keyword search you do of your library's databases examines books, periodicals, and newspapers to see a full range of possibilities for research. Also, be sure to consider as many synonyms as possible for the keyword terms you are using for your research topic.
- What results did you get from a keyword search on the World Wide Web? Be sure to conduct a keyword search using more than one search engine since



different services compile their data in different ways. Also, as was also the case with your library keyword search, be sure to consider as many synonyms as possible.

- Given these steps in the process, what is your working thesis? What variations of your working thesis did you consider along the way?

Review and Revision

As you will read again and again in this book, the first draft is only the beginning, the "raw materials" you create in order to really *write* your essay. That's because the most important step in the process of writing is showing your work to others—your instructor, your classmates, readers you trust, your friends, and so forth—and making changes based on your impressions of their feedback.

☛ **Hyperlink:** For guidelines and tips for working with your classmates in peer review sessions, see chapter four "How To Collaborate and Write With Others," particularly the section "Peer Review as Collaboration."

When you have a first draft complete and you are ready to show it to readers, ask them to think about these sorts of questions as they give you feedback on your writing:

- Is the topic of the topic proposal essay clear and reasonable to your readers?
- What's the working thesis? What sort of suggestions does your reader have to make the working thesis clearer? Is it clear to your readers that your working thesis is about a debatable position? Who might disagree with the your position? What do you think are some of the arguments against your position?
- What do your readers think is your main goal as a writer in pursuing this research project? Do your readers think you have made your purposes in writing this topic proposal and research project clear?
- Do your readers understand what library and Internet research you have already done on your topic? Are there particular examples of the library and Internet-based research that your readers think seem particularly useful or important?

Be careful to not limit your ideas for change to the things that are "easy" to fix (spelling, incomplete sentences, awkward phrases, and so forth). If you begin your process of revision by considering the questions suggested here (and similar questions you, your classmates, other readers, and your instructor might have), many of these "easy fix" problems will be fixed along the way. So as you go through the process of revision, think about it as a chance to really "re-see" and "re-imagine" what the whole writing project could look like.



A Student Example: **"Preventing Drunk Driving by Enforcement" by Daniel Marvins**

The assignment that was the basis for this essay asked students to write a "first person narrative" about the research project they would be working on for the semester. "It was really important to me think about a lot of different ideas and topics because I was worried that I might not be able to find enough research or stick with it," Marvins said. "This project helped me think this through."

Preventing Drunk Driving by Enforcement

Despite the fact that Americans are more aware of the problems of drunk driving than we were in the past, it is still a serious problem in the U.S. While educating everyone about the dangers of drunk driving is certainly important, I am interested in researching and writing about different ways to more strictly enforce drunk driving laws.

My working thesis for my research project is "While stronger enforcement measures to control drunk driving might be controversial and a violation of individual rights, they have to be enacted to stop drunk driving deaths." By "stronger enforcement measures," I mean things like police check points, lower legal levels of blood-alcohol, required breatholizer tests, less control on police searching cars, and stronger jail sentences.

I got the idea to focus on this topic by working on some of the different brainstorming techniques we talked about in class. I tried several different brainstorming techniques including freewriting and clustering. For me, the most useful technique was making a list of ideas and then talking it over with the other students in my group.

We all agreed that drunk driving would be a good topic, but I thought about writing about other topics too. For example, I think it would also be interesting to write about gun control laws, especially how they might effect deaths with kids and guns. I also thought it might be interesting to do research on the tobacco business and the lawsuits different states are conducting against them.

But I am more interested in exploring issues about drunk driving for a couple of different reasons. First, I think drunk driving is an



issue that a lot of people can relate to because most people know that it is dangerous and it is a bad idea. For example, we hear and read messages about not driving drunk in a lot of different advertisements. Still, even though everyone knows it is a bad idea, there are still a lot of deaths and injuries that result from drunk driving.

Second, I'm interested in doing research on stronger enforcement of drunk driving laws because I am not sure I have made my own mind up about it. Like everyone else, I of course think drunk driving is bad and police and society should do everything they can do to prevent people from driving drunk. On the other hand, I also think it's bad for police to pull over everyone they think might be drunk even when they don't know for sure. Strong enforcement might stop a lot of drunk driving, but it also gives police more chances to violate individual liberties and rights.

I have done a little bit of research already and I don't think I'm going to have any problem finding evidence to support my topic. Drunk driving seems to be a pretty common topic with a lot of different things written about it. I did a quick search of the library's databases and the World Wide Web and I found thousands of different articles. I skimmed the titles and it seemed like a lot of them would be very relevant and useful for my subject.

Drunk driving is a serious problem and everyone agrees that we should do something about it. The question is what should "it" be? My hope is that through my research, I will learn more about how stronger enforcement of drunk driving laws can curtail drunk driving, and I hope to be able to convince my readers of this, too.



Chapter Six

The Annotated Bibliography Exercise

- What is an Annotated Bibliography?
- Why Write Annotated Bibliographies?
- “How many sources do I need?”
- Using Computers to Write Annotated Bibliographies
- The Process of Writing the Annotated Bibliography
 - * A Sample Assignment
 - * The Annotated Bibliography and Collaboration
 - * Questions to Ask while Writing and Researching
 - * Review and Revision

What is an Annotated Bibliography?

As you develop a working thesis for your research project and begin to collect different pieces of evidence, you will soon find yourself needing some sort of system for keeping track of everything. The system discussed in this chapter is an **annotated bibliography**, which is a list of sources on a particular topic that includes a brief summary of what each source is about. This writing exercise is a bit different from the others in this part of *The Process of Research Writing* in that isn't an “essay” per se; rather it is an ongoing writing project that you will be “building” as you discover new pieces of evidence for your research project.

Here is an example of an entry from an annotated bibliography in MLA style:

Parsons, Matt. “Protecting Children on the Electronic Frontier: A Law Enforcement Challenge.” FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin 69.10 (2000): 22-26.

This article is about an educational program used by the U.S. Navy to educate people in the Navy and their families about some of the things that are potentially dangerous to children about the Internet. Parsons says that the educational program has been effective.

Annotated bibliography entries have two parts. The top of the entry is the **citation**. It is the part that starts “Parsons, Matt” and that lists information like the name of the writer, where the evidence appeared, the date of publication, and other publishing information.



☛ **Hyperlink:** For guidelines on how to properly write citations for your Annotated bibliographies, see Chapter 12, "Citing Your Research Using MLA or APA Style."

The second part of the entry is the **summary** of the evidence being cited. A good annotated bibliography summary provides enough information in a sentence or two to help you and others understand what the research is about in a neutral and non-opinionated way.

The first two sentences of this annotation are an example of this sort of very brief, "just the facts" sort of summary. In the brief summaries of entries in an annotated bibliography, stay away from making evaluations about the source—"I didn't like this article very much" or "I thought this article was great." The most important goal of your brief summary is to help you, colleagues, and other potential readers get an idea about the subject of the particular piece of evidence.

Summaries can be challenging to write, especially when you are trying to write them about longer and more complicated sources of research. Keep these guidelines in mind as you write your own summaries.

- **Keep your summary short.** Good summaries for annotated bibliographies are not "complete" summaries; rather, they provide the highlights of the evidence in as brief and concise a manner as possible, no more than a sentence or two.
- **Don't quote from what you are summarizing.** Summaries will be more useful to you and your colleagues if you write them in your own words. Instead of quoting directly what you think is the point of the piece of evidence, try to paraphrase it. (For more information on paraphrasing your evidence, see Chapter 3, "Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism").
- **Don't "cut and paste" from database abstracts.** Many of the periodical indexes that are available as part of your library's computer system include abstracts of articles. Do not "cut" this abstract material and then "paste" it into your own annotated bibliography. For one thing, this is plagiarism. Second, "cutting and pasting" from the abstract defeats one of the purposes of writing summaries and creating an annotated bibliography in the first place, which is to help you understand and explain your research.

Different writers will inevitably write slightly different summaries of the same evidence. Some differences between different writers' summaries of the same piece of evidence result from different interpretations of what is important in the research; there's nothing wrong with that.



However, two summaries from different writers should both provide a similar summary. In other words, it's not acceptable when the difference of interpretation is the result of a lack of understanding of the evidence.

Why Write Annotated Bibliographies?

An annotated bibliography is an excellent way to keep track of the research you gather for your project. Make no mistake about it— **it is extremely important that you keep track of all of your evidence for your research project, and that you keep track of it from the beginning of the process of research writing.**

There's nothing more frustrating than finding an excellent article or book chapter you are excited about incorporating into your research project, only to realize you have forgotten where you found the article or book chapter in the first place. This is extremely frustrating, and it's easily avoided by doing something like writing an annotated bibliography.

You could use other methods for keeping track of your research. For example, you could use note cards and write down the source information as a proper citation, then write down the information about the source that is important. If the material you know you want to use from a certain source is short enough, you might even write a direct quote, which is where you write down word for word what the source says exactly as it is written. At other times, you can write a paraphrase, which is where you write down what the source means using your own words.

While note cards and other methods have their advantages, annotated bibliographies are an extremely useful tool for keeping track of your research. An annotated bibliography:

- Centralizes your research into one document that you can keep track of both as a print-out of a word-processed file and as a file you save electronically.
- Allows you to "copy and paste" citation information into the works cited part of your research project.

An annotated bibliography also gives you the space to start writing and thinking a bit about how some of your research might fit into your project. Consider these two sample entries from an annotated bibliography from a research project on pharmaceutical advertising:

Siegel, Marc. "Fighting the Drug (ad) Wars." The Nation 17
June 2002: 21.

Siegel, who is a doctor himself, writes about how drug advertising has undermined the communication between



doctors and patients. He says that drug ads have driven up the costs of prescription drugs, particularly big selling drugs like those for cholesterol.

Wechsler, Jill. "Minority Docs See DTC Ads as Way to Address 'Race Gap.'" Pharmaceutical Executive May 2002: 32, 34. WilsonSelect Database. Eastern Michigan University Halle Library. 20 October 2002. <<http://www.emich.edu/halle>>.

This article is about a study that said that African-American doctors saw advertising of prescription drugs as a way of educating their patients. The ads are useful because they talk about diseases that affect African-Americans.

Even from the limited amount of information available in these entries, it's clear that a relationship between these articles exists. Both are similar articles about how the doctor/patient relationship is affected by drug advertising. But both are also different. The first article is from the newspaper *The Nation*, which is in many ways similar to an academic journal and which is also known for its liberal views. The second article is from a trade journal (also similar to academic journals in many ways) that obviously is an advocate for the pharmaceutical industry.

In other words, in the process of compiling an annotated bibliography, you are doing more than keeping track of your research. You are starting to make some comparisons and beginning to see some relationships between your evidence, a process that will become increasingly important as you gather more research and work your way through the different exercises that lead to the research project.

But remember: However you decide to keep track of your research as you progress through your project—annotated bibliography, note cards, or another method—**the important thing is that you need to keep track of your research as you progress through your project!**

How many sources do I need?

Inevitably, students in research writing classes always ask how many sources they need to include in their research projects. In one sense, "how many sources do I need?" is a utilitarian question, one usually attached to a student's exploration of what it will take to get a particular grade. Considered more abstractly, this question is also an effort to explore the scope of a research project.



Like a certain page or word count requirement, the question "how many sources do I need?" is an effort to get a handle on the scope of the research project assignment. In that sense, asking about the number of sources is probably a good idea, a little like asking how much something weighs before you attempt to pick it up.

But ultimately, there is no right or wrong answer to this question. Longer research projects tend to have evidence from more different sources than shorter projects, but there is no cut-and-dry formula where "X" number of pages will equal "X" number of sources.

However, an annotated bibliography should contain significantly more entries than you intend or expect to include in your research project. For example, if you think you will need or if your instructor requires you to have research from about seven different sources, you should probably have about 15 different entries on your annotated bibliography.

The reasons you need to find twice as many sources as you are likely to use is that you want to find and use the *best* research you can reasonably find, not the *first* pieces of research you can find. Usually, researchers have to look at a lot more information than they would ever include in a research writing project to begin making judgements about their research. And by far the worst thing you can do in your research is to stop right after you have found the number of sources required by the instructor for your project.

Using Computers to Write Annotated Bibliographies

Personal computers, word-processing software, and the Internet can make putting together an annotated bibliography more useful and a lot easier. If you use word-processing software to create your annotated bibliography, you can dramatically simplify the process of creating a "works cited" or "references" page, which is a list of the sources you quote in your research project. All you will have to do is "copy and paste" the citation from the annotated bibliography into your research project—that is, using the functions of your computer and word processing software, "copy" the full citation that you have completed on your annotated bibliography page and "paste" it into the works cited page of your research project.

This same sort of "copy and paste" function also comes in handy when doing research on the web. For example, you can usually copy and paste the citation information from your library's online database for pieces of evidence you are interested in reading. In most cases, you should be able to "copy and paste" information you find in your library's online database into a word processing file. Many library databases—both for books and for periodicals—also have a feature that will allow you to email yourself results from a search.

Keep two things in mind about using computers for your annotated bibliographies:



- You will have to reformat whatever information you get from the Internet or your library's databases in order to meet MLA or APA style.
- **Don't use the copy and paste feature to plagiarize!** Simply copying things like abstracts defeats one of the important purposes for writing an annotated bibliography in the first place, and it's cheating.

Assignment: Writing an Annotated Bibliography

As you conduct your research for your research writing project, compile an annotated bibliography with 15-20 entries. Each entry in your annotated bibliography should contain a citation, a brief summary of the cited material. You will be completing the project in phases and a complete and revised version of it will be due when you have completed your research.

You should think of your annotated bibliography as having roughly twice as many sources as the number of sources you will need to include for the research project, but your instructor might have a different requirement regarding the number of sources required.

Also, you should work on this assignment in parts. Going to the library and trying to complete this assignment in one sitting could turn this into a dreadful writing experience. However, if you complete it in stages, you will have a much better understanding of how your resources relate to each other.

You will probably need to discuss with your instructor the style of citation you need to follow for your research project and your annotated bibliography. Following a citation style isn't difficult to do, but you will want to be consistent and aware of the "rules" from the beginning. In other words, if you start off using MLA style, don't switch to APA style halfway through your annotated bibliography or your research project.

☛ **Hyperlink:** For an explanation of the differences of and the guidelines for using both MLA and APA style, see "Chapter 12, "Citing Your Researching Using MLA or APA Style."

Last, but not least, you will need to discuss with your instructor the sorts of materials you need to include in your research and your annotated bibliography. You may be required to include a balance of research from scholarly and non-scholarly sources, and from "traditional" print resources (books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and so forth) and the Internet.

Questions to ask while writing and researching

- Would you classify the material as a primary or a secondary source? Does the research seem to be difficult to categorize this way? (For more information on primary and secondary sources, see Chapter 1, "Thinking



Critically About Research" and the section "Primary versus Secondary Research").

- Is the research from a scholarly or a non-scholarly publication? Does the research seem difficult to categorize this way?
- Is the research from the Internet—a web page, a newsgroup, an email message, etc.? **Remember: while Internet research is not necessarily "bad" research, you do need to be more careful in evaluating the credibility of Internet-based sources.** (For more information on evaluating Internet research, see Chapter 1, "Thinking Critically About Research," and the sections "The Internet: The Researcher's Challenge" and "Evaluating the Quality and Credibility of Your Research.")
- Do you know who wrote the material you are including in your annotated bibliography? What qualifications does your source say the writer has?
- Why do you think the writer wrote it? Do they have a self-interest or a political viewpoint that might make them overly biased?
- Besides the differences between scholarly, non-scholarly, and Internet sources, what else do you know about where your research was published? Is it an academic book? An article in a respected journal? An article in a news magazine or newspaper?
- When was it published? Given your research topic, how important do you think the date of publication is?
- Are you keeping your summaries brief and to the point, focusing on the point your research source is trying to make?
- If it's part of the assignment, are you including a sentence or two about how you see this piece of research fitting into your overall research project?

Revision and Review

Because of its ongoing nature, revising an annotated bibliography is a bit different than the typical revision process. Take opportunities as you compile your annotated bibliography to show your work in progress to your classmates, your instructor, and other readers you trust. If you are working collaboratively on your research projects, you will certainly want to share your annotated bibliography with classmates who are working on a similar topic. Working together like this can be a very useful way to get more ideas about where your research is going.

It is best to approach the annotated bibliography in smaller steps—five or six entries at a time. If that's how you're approaching this project, then you will always be in a process of revision and review with your classmates and your



instructor. You and your readers (your instructor and your classmates) should think about these questions as you revise, review, and add entries:

- Are the summaries you are including brief and to the point? Do your readers understand what the cited articles are about?
- Are you following a particular style guide consistently?
- If you are including a sentence or two about each of your resources, how do these sentences fit with your working thesis? Are they clarifying parts of your working thesis that were previously unclear? Are they suggesting changes to the approach you took when you began the research process?
- Based on the research you have so far, what other types of research do you think you need to find?



Chapter Ten

The Research Essay

- A “Research Essay” Instead of A “Research Paper”
- Getting Ready: Questions to Ask Yourself About Your Research Essay
- Creating and Revising a Formal Outline
- The Introduction
- Giving Your Readers Background Information
- Weaving in Evidence to Support Your Points
- Accounting for the Opposition: Antithetical Arguments
- Conclusions
- Works Cited/Bibliography

A “Research Essay” or a “Research Project” instead of a “Research Paper”

Throughout this book, I’ve purposefully avoided the term “research paper” for three reasons. First, while teachers assign and students write essays in college classes that are commonly called “research papers,” there is no clear consensus on the definition of a research paper. This is because the definition of “research” differs from field to field, and even between instructors within the same discipline teaching the same course.

Second, while the papers we tend to call “research papers” do indeed include research, most other kinds of college writing require at least some research as well. All of the exercises outlined in Part Two of the book, “Exercises in the Process of Research” are examples of this: while none of these assignments are “research papers,” all of them involve research in order to make a point.

A third reason has to do with the connotations of the word “paper” versus the word “essay.” For me, “paper” suggests something static, concrete, routine, and uninteresting—think of the negative connotations of the term bureaucratic “paperwork,” or the policing mechanism of “showing your papers” to the authorities. On the other hand, the word “essay” has more positive connotations: dynamic, flexible, unique, and creative. The definitions of essay in dictionaries I have examined include terms like “attempt,” “endeavor,” and “a try.” As a writer, I would much rather work on something that was a dynamic and creative endeavor rather than a static and routine document. My hope is that you, as a student and a writer, feel the same way.

This chapter is about writing a research essay. While I cannot offer you *exact* guidelines of how to do this for each and every situation where you will be asked to write such a paper or essay, I can provide you with the general guidelines and advice you’ll need to successfully complete these sorts of writing assignments. In the next chapter, I’ll describe a few alternatives to presenting your research in a conventional essay.



Getting Ready: Questions to Ask Yourself About Your Research Essay

If you are coming to this chapter after working through some of the writing exercises in Part Two, “Exercises in the Process of Research,” then you are ready to dive into your research essay. By this point, you probably have done some combination of the following things:

- Thought about different kinds of evidence to support your research;
- Been to the library and the internet to gather evidence;
- Developed an annotated bibliography for your evidence;
- Written and revised a working thesis for your research;
- Critically analyzed and written about key pieces of your evidence;
- Considered the reasons for disagreeing and questioning the premise of your working thesis; and
- Categorized and evaluated your evidence.

In other words, you already have been working on your research essay through the process of research writing.

But before diving into writing a research essay, you need to take a moment to ask yourself, your colleagues, and your teacher some important questions about the nature of your project.

- **What is the specific assignment?**

It is crucial to consider the teacher’s directions and assignment for your research essay. The teacher’s specific directions will in large part determine what you are required to do to successfully complete your essay, just as they did with the exercises you completed in part two of this book.

If you have been given the option to choose your own research topic, the assignment for the research essay itself might be open-ended. For example:

Write a research essay about the working thesis that you have been working on with the previous writing assignments. Your essay should be about ten pages long, it should include ample evidence to support your point, and it should follow MLA style.

Some research writing assignments are more specific than this, of course. For example, here is a research writing assignment for a poetry class:

Write a seven to ten page research essay about one of the poets discussed in the last five chapters of our textbook and his or her poems. Besides your analysis and interpretation of the poems, be sure to cite scholarly research that supports your points. You should also include research on the cultural and historic contexts the poet was working within. Be sure to use MLA documentation style throughout your essay.



Obviously, you probably wouldn't be able to write a research project about the problems of advertising prescription drugs on television in a History class that focused on the American Revolution.

- **What is the main purpose of your research essay?**

Has the goal of your essay been to answer specific questions based on assigned reading material and your research? Or has the purpose of your research been more open-ended and abstract, perhaps to learn more about issues and topics to share with a wider audience? In other words, is your research essay supposed to answer questions that indicate that you have learned about a set and defined subject matter (usually a subject matter which your teacher already more or less understands), or is your essay supposed to discover and discuss an issue that is potentially unknown to your audience, including your teacher.

The “demonstrating knowledge about a defined subject matter” purpose for research is quite common in academic writing. For example, a political science professor might ask students to write a research project about the Bill of Rights in order to help her students learn about the Bill of Rights and to demonstrate an understanding of these important amendments to the U.S. Constitution. But presumably, the professor already knows a fair amount the Bill of Rights, which means she is probably more concerned with finding out if you can demonstrate that you have learned and have formed an opinion about the Bill of Rights based on your research and study.

“Discovering and discussing an issue that is potentially unknown to your audience” is also a very common assignment, particularly in composition courses. As the examples included throughout *The Process of Research Writing* suggest, the subject matter for research essays that are designed to inform your audience about something new is almost unlimited.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See “Chapter 5: The Working Thesis Exercise” and the guidelines for “Working With Assigned Topics” and “Coming Up With a Topic of Your Own Idea.”

Even if all of your classmates have been researching a similar research idea, chances are your particular take on that idea has gone in a different direction. For example, you and some of your classmates might have begun your research by studying the effect on children of violence on television, either because that was a topic assigned by the teacher or because you simply shared an interest in the general topic. But as you have focused and refined this initially broad topic, you and your classmates will inevitably go into different directions, perhaps focusing on different genres (violence in cartoons versus live-action shows), on different age groups (the effect of violent television on pre-schoolers versus the effect on teen-agers), or on different conclusions about the effect of television violence in the first place (it is harmful versus there is no real effect).

- **Who is the main audience for your research writing project?**

Besides your teacher and your classmates, who are you trying to reach with your research? Who are you trying to convince as a result of the research you have done?



What do you think is fair to assume that this audience knows or doesn't know about the topic of your research project? Purpose and audience are obviously closely related because the reason for writing something has a lot to do with who you are writing it for, and who you are writing something for certainly has a lot to do with your purposes in writing in the first place.

In composition classes, it is usually presumed that your audience includes your teacher and your classmates. After all, one of the most important reasons you are working on this research project in the first place is to meet the requirements of this class, and your teacher and your classmates have been with you as an audience every step of the way.

Contemplating an audience beyond your peers and teachers can sometimes be difficult, but if you have worked through the exercises in Part Two of *The Process of Research Writing*, you probably have at least some sense of an audience beyond the confines of your class. For example, one of the purposes "Critique Exercise" in Chapter 7 is to explain to your readers why they might be interested in reading the text that you are critiquing. The goal of the "Antithesis Exercise" in Chapter 8 is to consider the position of those who would disagree with the position you are taking. So directly and indirectly, you've probably been thinking about your readers for a while now.

Still, it might be useful for you to try to be even more specific about your audience as you begin your research essay. Do you know any "real people" (friends, neighbors, relatives, etc.) who might be an ideal reader for your research essay? Can you at least imagine what an ideal reader might want to get out of reading your research essay?

I'm not trying to suggest that you ought to ignore your teacher and your classmates as your primary audience. But research essays, like most forms of writing, are strongest when they are intended for a more specific audience, either someone the writer knows or someone the writer can imagine. Teachers and classmates are certainly part of this audience, but trying to reach an audience of potential readers beyond the classroom and the assignment will make for a stronger essay.

• **What sort of "voice" or "authority" do you think is appropriate for your research project?**

Do you want to take on a personal and more casual tone in your writing, or do you want to present a less personal and less casual tone? Do you want to use first person, the "I" pronoun, or do you want to avoid it?

My students are often surprised to learn that it is perfectly acceptable in many types of research and academic writing for writers to use the first person pronoun, "I." It is the tone I've taken with this textbook, and it is an approach that is very common in many fields, particularly those that tend to be grouped under the term "the humanities."

For example, consider this paragraph from Kelly Ritter's essay "The Economics of Authorship: Online Paper Mills, Student Writers, and First-Year Composition," which appeared in June 2005 issue of one of the leading journals in the field of composition and rhetoric, *College Composition and Communication*:



When considering whether, when, and how often to purchase an academic paper from an online paper-mill site, first-year composition students therefore work with two factors that I wish to investigate here in pursuit of answering the questions posed above: the negligible desire to do one's own writing, or to be an author, with all that entails in this era of faceless authorship vis-à-vis the Internet; and the ever-shifting concept of "integrity," or responsibility when purchasing work, particularly in the anonymous arena of online consumerism. (603, emphasis added)

Throughout her thoughtful and well-researched essay, Ritter uses first person pronouns ("I" and "my," for example) when it is appropriate: "I think," "I believe," "my experiences," etc.

This sort of use of the personal pronoun is not limited to publications in English studies. This example comes from the journal *Law and Society Review* (Volume 39, Issue 2, 2005), which is an interdisciplinary journal concerned with the connections between society and the law. The article is titled "Preparing to Be Colonized: Land Tenure and Legal Strategy in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii" and it was written by law professor Stuart Banner:

The story of Hawaii complicates the conventional account of colonial land tenure reform. Why did the land tenure reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries receive its earliest implementation in, of all places, Hawaii? Why did the Hawaiians do this to themselves? What did they hope to gain from it? This article attempts to answer these questions. At the end, I briefly suggest why the answers may shed some light on the process of colonization in other times and places, and thus why the answers may be of interest to people who are not historians of Hawaii. (275, emphasis added)

Banner uses both "I" and "my" throughout the article, again when it's appropriate.

Even this cursory examination of the sort of writing academic writers publish in scholarly journals will demonstrate my point: academic journals *routinely* publish articles that make use of the first person pronoun. Writers in academic fields that tend to be called "the sciences" (chemistry, biology, physics, and so forth, but also more "soft" sciences like sociology or psychology) are more likely to avoid the personal pronoun or to refer to themselves as "the researcher," "the author," or something similar. But even in these fields, "I" does frequently appear.

The point is this: using "I" is not inherently *wrong* for your research essay or for any other type of academic essay. However, you need to be aware of your choice of first person versus third person and your role as a writer in your research project.

Generally speaking, the use of the first person "I" pronoun creates a greater closeness and informality in your text, which can create a greater sense of intimacy between the writer and the reader. This is the main reason I've used "I" in *The Process of Research Writing*: using the first person pronoun in a textbook like this lessens the distance



between us (you as student/reader and me as writer), and I think it makes for easier reading of this material.

If you do decide to use a first person voice in your essay, make sure that the focus stays on your research and does not shift to you the writer. When teachers say “don’t use I,” what they are really cautioning against is the *overuse* of the word “I” such that the focus of the essay shifts from the research to “you” the writer. While mixing autobiography and research writing can be interesting (as I will touch on in the next chapter on alternatives to the research essay), it is not the approach you want to take in a traditional academic research essay.

The third person pronoun (and avoidance of the use of “I”) tends to have the opposite effect of the first person pronoun: it creates a sense of distance between writer and reader, and it lends a greater formality to the text. This can be useful in research writing because it tends to emphasize research and evidence in order to persuade an audience.

(I should note that much of this textbook is presented in what is called second person voice, using the “you” pronoun. Second person is very effective for writing instructions, but generally speaking, I would discourage you from taking this approach in your research project.)

In other words, “first person” and “third person” are both potentially acceptable choices, depending on the assignment, the main purpose of your assignment, and the audience you are trying to reach. Just be sure to consistent—don’t switch between third person and first person in the same essay.

- **What is your working thesis and how has it changed and evolved up to this point?**

If you’ve worked through some of the exercises in part two of *The Process of Research Writing*, you already know how important it is to have an evolving working thesis. If you haven’t read this part of the textbook, you might want to do so before getting too far along with your research project. Chapter Five, “The Working Thesis Exercise,” is an especially important chapter to read and review.

Remember: a *working* thesis is one that changes and evolves as you write and research. It is perfectly acceptable to change your thesis in the writing process based on your research.



Exercise 10.1

Working alone or in small groups, answer these questions about your research essay before you begin writing it:

- What is the specific research writing assignment? Do you have written instructions from the teacher for this assignment? Are there any details regarding page length, arrangement, or the amount of support evidence that you need to address? In your own words, restate the assignment for the research essay.
- What is the purpose of the research writing assignment? Is the main purpose of your research essay to address specific questions, to provide new information to your audience, or some combination of the two?
- Who is the audience for your research writing assignment? Besides your teacher and classmates, who else might be interested in reading your research essay?
- What sort of voice are you going to use in your research essay? What do you think would be more appropriate for your project, first person or third person?
- What is your working thesis? Think back to the ways you began developing your working thesis in the exercises in part two of *The Process of Research Writing*. In what ways has your working thesis changed?

If you are working with a small group of classmates, do each of you agree with the basic answers to these questions? Do the answers to these questions spark other questions that you have and need to have answered by your classmates and your teacher before you begin your research writing project?

Once you have some working answers to these basic questions, it's time to start thinking about actually writing the research essay itself. For most research essay projects, you will have to consider at least most of these components in the process:

- The Formal Outline
- The Introduction
- Background Information
- Evidence to Support Your Points
- Antithetical Arguments and Answers
- The Conclusion
- Works Cited or Reference Information

The rest of this chapter explains these parts of the research essay and it concludes with an example that brings these elements together.



Creating and Revising a Formal Outline

Frequently, research essay assignments will also require you to include a formal outline, usually before the essay begins following the cover page. Formal outlines are sort of table of contents for your essay: they give the reader a summary of the main points and sub-points of what they are about to read.

The standard format for an outline looks something like this:

- I. First Major Point
 - A. First sub-point of the first major point
 - 1. First sub-point of the first sub-point
 - 2. Second sub-point of the first sub-point
 - B. Second sub-point of the first major point
- II. Second Major point

And so on. Alternatively, you may also be able to use a decimal outline to note the different points. For example:

- 1. First Major point
 - 1.1. First sub-point of the first major point
 - 1.1.1 First sub-point of the first sub-point
 - 1.1.2 Second sub-point of the first sub-point
 - 1.2. Second sub-point of the first major point
- 2. Second Major point

Sometimes, teachers ask student writers to include a “thesis statement” for their essay at the beginning of the outline.

Generally speaking, if you have one “point,” be it a major point or a sub-point, or sub-point of a sub-point (perhaps a sub-sub-point!), you need to have at least a second similar point. In other words, if you have a sub-point you are labeling “A,” you should have one labeled “B.” The best rule of thumb I can offer in terms of the grammar and syntax of your various points is to keep them short and consistent.



Now, while the formal outline is generally the first thing in your research essay after the title page, writing one is usually the **last** step in the writing process. Don't start writing your research essay by writing a formal outline first because it might limit the changes you can make to your essay during the writing process.

Of course, a *formal* outline is quite different from a *working* outline, one where you are more informally writing down ideas and "sketching" out plans for your research essay before or as you write. There are no specific rules or methods for making a working outline-- it could be a simple list of points, it could include details and reminders for the writer, or anything in-between.

Making a working outline is a good idea, particularly if your research essay will be a relatively long and complex one. Just be sure to not confuse these two very different outlining tools.

If you're having trouble starting to write your research essay, revisit some of the tips I suggest in the "Brainstorming for Ideas" section of Chapter Five, "The Working Thesis Exercise."

Exercise 10.2

- Working alone or in small groups, make a formal outline of an already completed essay. You can work with any of the sample essays in previous chapters in *The Process of Research Writing* or any other brief sample. **Don't** work with the sample research essay at the end of this chapter, though-- there is a sample formal outline included with it.
- If you and your classmates made a formal outline of the same essay, compare your outlines. Were there any significant differences in your approaches to making an outline? What were they?

The Introduction

Research essays have to begin somewhere, and this somewhere is called the "introduction." By "beginning," I don't necessarily mean *only* the first paragraph-- introductions in traditional research essays are frequently several paragraphs long. Generally speaking though, the introduction is about 25 percent or less of the total essay; in other words, in a ten-page, traditional research essay, the introduction would rarely be longer than two and a half pages. Introductions have two basic jobs to perform:

- To get the reader's attention; and
- To briefly explain what the rest of the essay will be about.



What is appropriate or what works to get the reader's attention depends on the audience you have in mind for your research essay and the sort of voice or authority you want to have with your essay. Frequently, it is a good idea to include some background material on the issue being discussed or a brief summary of the different sides of an argument. If you have an anecdote from either your own experience or your research that you think is relevant to the rest of your project or will be interesting to your readers, you might want to consider beginning with that story. Generally speaking, you should avoid mundane or clichéd beginnings like "This research essay is about..." or "In society today..."

The second job of an introduction in a traditional research essay is to explain to the reader what the rest of the essay is going to be about. This is frequently done by stating your "thesis statement," which is more or less where your working thesis has ended up after its inevitable changes and revisions.

A thesis statement can work in a lot of different places in the introduction, not only as the last sentence at the end of the first paragraph. It is also possible to let your readers know what your thesis is without ever directly stating it in a single sentence. This approach is common in a variety of different types of writing that use research, though traditionally, most academic research essays have a specific and identifiable thesis statement.

Let's take a look at this example of a **WEAK** introductory paragraph:

In our world today, there are many health problems, such as heart disease and cancer. Another serious problem that affects many people in this country is diabetes, particularly Type II diabetes. Diabetes is a disease where the body does not produce enough insulin, and the body needs insulin to process sugars and starches. It is a serious disease that effects millions of people, many of whom don't even know they have the disease. In this essay, I will discuss how eating sensibly and getting plenty of exercise are the most important factors in preventing Type 2 Diabetes.

The first two sentences of this introduction don't have much to do with the topic of diabetes, and the following sentences are rather vague. Also, this introduction doesn't offer much information about what the rest of the essay will be about, and it certainly doesn't capture the reader's attention.

Now, consider this revised and **BETTER** introductory paragraph:

Diabetes is a disease where the body does not produce enough of insulin to process starches and sugars



effectively. According to the American Diabetes Association web site, over 18 million Americans have diabetes, and as many as 5.2 million of these people are unaware that they have it. Perhaps even more striking is that the most common form of diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes, is largely preventable with a sensible diet and exercise.

This introduction is much more specific and to the point, and because of that, it does a better job of getting the reader's attention. Also, because it is very specific, this introduction gives a better sense to the reader where the rest of the essay will be leading.

While the introduction is of course the first thing your readers will see, **make sure it is one of the last things you decide to revise in the process of writing your research essay.** You will probably start writing your essay by writing an introduction—after all, you've got to start somewhere. But it is nearly impossible to write a very effective introduction if the rest of the essay hasn't been written yet, which is why you will certainly want to return to the introduction to do some revision work after you've written your essay.



Exercise 10.3

- Working alone or in small groups, revise one of the following “bad” introductions, being sure to get the reader’s attention, to make clear what the essay being introduced would be about, and to eliminate unneeded words and clichés. Of course, since you don’t have the entire essay, so you may have to take certain liberties with these passages. But the goal is to improve these “bad beginnings” without changing their meaning.

Example #1:

In society today, there are many problems with television shows. A lot of them are not very entertaining at all. Others are completely inappropriate for children. It’s hard to believe that these things are on TV at all. In fact, because of a lot of the bad things that have been on television in recent years, broadcasters have had to censor more and more shows. They have done some of this voluntarily, but they have also been required to do this by irate advertisers and viewers as well. For example, consider Janet Jackson’s famous “wardrobe malfunction” at the 2004 Super Bowl. I contend that Jackson’s performance in the 2004 Super Bowl, accident or not, has lead to more censorship on television.

Example #2:

There are a lot of challenges to being a college student. We all know that studying and working hard will pay off in the end. A lot of college students also enjoy to cheer for their college teams. A lot of colleges and universities will do whatever it takes to have winning teams. In fact, some colleges and universities are even willing to allow in students with bad test scores and very low high school grades as long as they are great athletes and can make the team better. All of this leads to a difficult to deny observation: college sports, especially Division I football, is full of corruption and it is damaging the academic integrity of some of our best universities.



Background Information (or Helping Your Reader Find a Context)

It is always important to explain, contextualize, and orientate your readers within any piece of writing. Your research essay is no different in that you need to include background information on your topic in order to create the right context for the project.

In one sense, you're giving your reader important background information every time you fully introduce and explain a piece of evidence or an argument you are making. But often times, research essays include some background information about the overall topic near the beginning of the essay. Sometimes, this is done briefly as part of the introduction section of the essay; at other times, this is best accomplished with a more detailed section after the introduction and near the beginning of the essay.

How much background information you need to provide and how much context you need to establish depends a great deal on how you answer the "Getting Ready" questions at the beginning of this chapter, particularly the questions in which you are asked to consider your *purpose* and your *audience*. If one of the purposes of your essay is to convince a primary audience of readers who know little about your topic or your argument, you will have to provide more background information than you would if the main purpose of your essay was to convince a primary audience that knows a lot about your topic. **But even if you can assume your audience is as familiar with the topic of your essay as you, it's still important to provide at least some background on your specific approach to the issue in your essay.**

It's almost always better to give your readers "too much" background information than "too little." In my experience, students too often assume too much about what their readers (the teacher included!) knows about their research essay. There are several reasons why this is the case; perhaps it is because students so involved in their research forget that their readers haven't been doing the same kind of research. The result is that sometimes students "cut corners" in terms of helping their audience through their essay. I think that the best way to avoid these kinds of misunderstandings is for you to always remember that your readers don't know as much about your specific essay as you do, and part of your job as a writer is to guide your reader through the text.

In Casey Copeman's research essay at the end of this chapter, the context and background information for the subject matter after the introduction; for example:

The problems surrounding corruption in university athletics have been around ever since sports have been considered important in American culture. People have emphasized the importance of sports and the significance of winning for a long time. According to Jerome Cramer in a special report published in *Phi Delta Kappan*, "Sports are a powerful experience, and America somehow took this belief of the ennobling nature of sports and transformed it into a quasi-religion" (Cramer K1).



Casey's subject matter, college athletics, was one that she assumed most of her primary audience of fellow college students and classmates were familiar with. Nonetheless, she does provide some basic information about the importance of sports team in society and in universities in particular.

Weaving in Evidence to Support Your Point

Throughout your research essay, you need to include evidence that supports your points. There is no firm rule as to "how much" research you will want or need to include in your research essay. Like so many other things with research writing, it depends on your purpose, the audience, the assignment, and so forth. **But generally speaking, you need to have a piece of evidence in the form of a direct quote or paraphrase every time you make a claim that you cannot assume your audience "just knows."**

☛ **Hyperlink:** See "Chapter 3: "Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism" for more details on how to effectively introduce quotes and paraphrases into your research writing.

Stringing together a series of quotes and paraphrases from different sources might show that you have done a lot of research on a particular topic, but your audience wants to know your *interpretation* of these quotes and paraphrases, and your reader wants and needs to be guided through your research. To do this, you need to work at explaining the significance of your evidence throughout your essay.

For example, this passage does a **BAD** job of introducing and weaving in evidence to support a point.

In America today, the desire to have a winning team drives universities to admit academically unqualified students. "At many universities, the tradition of athletic success requires coaches to produce not only competitive by championship-winning teams" (Duderstadt 191).

The connection between the sentence and the evidence is not as clear as it could be. Further, the quotation is simply "dropped in" with no explanation. Now, compare it with this revised and **BETTER** example:

The desire to always have a winning team has driven many universities to admit academically unqualified student athletes to their school just to improve their sports teams. According to James Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan, the corruption of university athletics usually begins with the process of recruiting and admitting student athletes. He states that, "At many universities, the tradition of athletic success requires coaches to produce not only competitive but championship-winning teams" (Duderstadt 191).



Remember: the point of using research in writing (be it a traditional research essay or any other form of research writing) is not merely to offer your audience a bunch of evidence on a topic. Rather, the point of research writing is to interpret your research in order to persuade an audience.

Antithetical Arguments and Answers

Most research essays anticipate and answer antithetical arguments, the ways in which a reader might disagree with your point. Besides demonstrating your knowledge of the different sides of the issue, acknowledging and answering the antithetical arguments in your research essay will go a long way toward convincing some of your readers that the point you are making is correct.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See “Chapter 8: “The Antithesis Exercise,” which offers strategies for researching, developing, and answering antithetical arguments in your research writing.

Antithetical arguments can be placed almost anywhere within a research essay, including the introduction or the conclusion. However, you want to be sure that the antithetical arguments are accompanied by “answering” evidence and arguments. After all, the point of presenting antithetical arguments is to explain why the point you are supporting with research is the correct one.

In the essay at the end of this chapter, Casey brings up antithetical points at several points in her essay. For example:

To be fair, being a student-athlete isn't easy. They are faced with difficult situations when having to juggle their athletic life and their academic life at school. As Duderstadt said, "Excelling in academics is challenging enough without the additional pressures of participating in highly competitive athletic programs" (Duderstadt 190). So I can see why some athletes might experience trouble fitting all of the studying and coursework into their busy schedules.



The Conclusion

As research essays have a beginning, so do they have an ending, generally called a conclusion. While the main purpose of an introduction is to get the reader's attention and to explain what the essay will be about, the goal of a conclusion is to bring the reader to a satisfying point of closure. In other words, a good conclusion does not merely "end" an essay; it wraps things up.

It is usually a good idea to make a connection in the conclusion of your essay with the introduction, particularly if you began your essay with something like a relevant anecdote or a rhetorical question. You may want to restate your thesis, though you don't necessarily have to restate your thesis in exactly the same words you used in your introduction. It is also usually not a good idea to end your essay with obvious concluding cues or clichéd phrases like "in conclusion."

Conclusions are similar to introductions on a number of different levels. First, like introductions, they are important since they leave definite "impressions" on the reader—in this case, the important "last" impression. Second, conclusions are almost as difficult to write and revise as introductions. Because of this, be sure to take extra time and care to revise your conclusion.

Here's the conclusion of Casey Copeman's essay, which is included at the end of this chapter:

As James Moore and Sherry Watt say in their essay "Who Are Student Athletes?", the "marriage between higher education and intercollegiate athletics has been turbulent, and always will be" (7). The NCAA has tried to make scholarly success at least as important as athletic success with requirements like Proposition 48 and Proposition 16. But there are still too many cases where under-prepared students are admitted to college because they can play a sport, and there are too still too many instances where universities let their athletes get away with being poor students because they are a sport superstar. I like cheering for my college team as much as anyone else, but I would rather cheer for college players who were students who worried about learning and success in the classroom, too.



Exercise 10.4

- If you worked with the examples in Exercise 10.3 on page xxx, take another look at the revised introductions you wrote. Based on the work you did in that exercise, write a fitting conclusion. Once again, since you don't have the entire essay, you'll have to take some liberties with what you decide to include in your conclusion.

“Works Cited” or “Reference” Information

If I were to give you one and only one “firm and definite” rule about research essay writing, it would be that you **must** have a section following the conclusion of your essay that explains to the reader where the evidence you cite comes from. This information is especially important in academic essays since academic readers are keenly interested in the evidence that supports your point.

If you're following the Modern Language Association rules for citing evidence, this last section is called “Works Cited.” If you're following the American Psychological Association rules, it's called “References.” In either case, this is the place where you list the full citation of all the evidence you quote or paraphrase in your research essay.

Note that for both MLA and APA style, research you read but didn't actually use in your research essay is not included. Your teacher might want you to provide a “bibliography” with your research essay that does include this information, but this is not the same thing.

☛ **Hyperlink:** For guidelines for properly citing your evidence and compiling “Works Cited” or “Reference” pages, see “Chapter 12: Citing Your Research Using MLA or APA Style.”

Frankly, one of the most difficult aspects of this part of the research essay is the formatting—alphabetizing, getting the spacing right, underlining titles or putting them in quotes, periods here, commas there, and so forth. Again, see the appendix for information on how to do this. But if you have been keeping and adding to an annotated bibliography as you have progressed through the process of research (as discussed in chapter six), this part of the essay can actually be merely a matter of checking your sources and “copying” the citation information from the word processing file where you have saved your annotated bibliography and “pasting” it into the word processing file where you are saving your research essay.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See the assignment for constructing an annotated bibliography in “Chapter 6: The Annotated Bibliography Exercise.”



A Student Example:
“The Corruption Surrounding University Athletics” by Casey K. Copeman

The assignment that Casey Copeman followed to write this research essay is similar to the assignment described earlier in this chapter:

Write a research essay about the working thesis that you have been working on with the previous writing assignments. Your essay should be about ten pages long, it should include ample evidence to support your point, and it should follow MLA style.

Of course, it's also important to remember that Casey's work on this project began long before she wrote this essay with the exercises she worked through to develop her working thesis, to gather evidence, and to evaluate and categorize it.



The Corruption Surrounding University Athletics

By Casey Copeman

Outline

I. Introduction

II. Origins and description of the problem

- A. The significance of sports in our society
- B. The drive and pressure for universities to win leads to admitting academically unqualified student athletes

III. The Eligibility Rules Proposition 48 and Proposition 16

- A. Proposition 48 explained
- B. Proposition 16 explained
- C. Proposition 16 challenged but upheld in the courts
- D. Academic eligibility rules still broken

IV. Rules Broken At School

- A. The pressures faced by athletes and universities
 - 1. The pressures of being a student athlete
 - 2. The pressures put on universities to recruit "good players"
- B. "Athletics" emphasized over studies indirectly and directly
 - 1. The indirect message is about sports above academics
 - 2. Occasionally, the message to emphasize sports is direct
 - 3. Student-athletes often steered into "easy" classes
- C. Good student athletes, mostly in sports other than football and men's basketball, get a bad name

V. Conclusion



Most young people who are trying to get into college have to spend a lot of time studying and worrying. They study to get good grades in high school and to get good test scores, and they worry about whether or not all of the studying will be enough to get them into the college of their choice. But there is one group of college students who don't have to study and worry as much, as long as they are outstanding football or basketball players: student athletes.

Issues involving student athletes with unsatisfactory test scores, extremely low grade point averages, special privileges given to them by the schools, and issues concerning their coaches' influence on them academically, have all been causes of concern with university athletics. The result is a pattern where athletics at the university level are full of corruption surrounding the academic standards and admittance policy that are placed upon some university athletes. In this essay, I will explain what I see as the source of this corruption and the ways in which academic standards are compromised in the name of winning.

The problems surrounding corruption in university athletics have been around ever since sports have been considered important in American culture. People have emphasized the importance of sports and the significance of winning for a long time. According to Jerome Cramer in a special report published in Phi Delta Kappan, "Sports are a powerful experience, and America somehow took this belief of the ennobling nature of sports and transformed it into a quasi-religion" (Cramer K1). Cramer also says,

"The original sin of sports in United States society seems to have been committed when we allowed our games to assume too much of our lives. It was as if we could measure our



moral fiber by the won/lost record of our local team. Once schools began to organize sports, winning became a serious institutional consideration. Our innocence vanished when we refused to accept losing" (Cramer K1).

This importance of sports and winning in the United States today is what has led to this corruption that we now see in our top universities when it comes to athletes and how they are treated by their schools.

The desire to always have a winning team has driven many universities to admit academically unqualified student athletes to their school just to improve their sports teams. According to James Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan, the corruption of university athletics usually begins with the process of recruiting and admitting student athletes. He states that, "At many universities, the tradition of athletic success requires coaches to produce not only competitive but championship-winning teams" (Duderstadt 191). This, in turn, "puts enormous pressure to recruit the most outstanding high school athletes each year, since this has become the key determinant of competitive success in major college sports"(Duderstadt 192).

According to Duderstadt, "Coaches and admissions officers have long known that the pool of students who excel at academics and athletics is simply too small to fill their rosters with players who meet the usual admissions criteria" (Duderstadt 193). This pressure put on coaches to recruit the best athletes "leads them to recruit athletes who are clearly unprepared for college work or who have little interest in a college education" (Duderstadt 193). This obviously leads to a problem because although most universities have standards that must be met for students to be admitted, "in all too many cases, recruited



athletes fail to meet even these minimum standards" (Duderstadt 193).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) set some minimum standards for admission in January of 1986. They had decided that "the time had come to make sure that college athletes were not only athletically qualified, but that they also were academically competent to represent schools of higher learning" (Cramer K4). Proposition 48 required that "all entering athletes score a minimum of 700 on their Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and achieve a minimum high school grade point average in core academic courses of 2.0, or sit out their first year" (Duderstadt 194). This seemed like a fairly reasonable rule to most universities around the country, and some even thought, "a kid who can not score a combined 700 and keep a C average in high school should not be in college in the first place" (Cramer K4).

In 1992, the NCAA changed these requirements slightly with the introduction of proposition 16. According to the document "Who Can Play? An Examination of NCAA's Proposition 16," which was published on the National Center for Educational Statistics in August 1995, Proposition 16 requirements are "more strict than the current Proposition 48 requirements. The new criteria are based on a combination of high school grade point average (GPA) in 13 core courses and specified SAT (or ACT) scores."

Some coaches and college athletes have argued against proposition 48 and proposition 16 because they claim that they unfairly discriminate against African-American students. According to Robert Fullinwider's web-based article "Academic Standards and the NCAA," some "black coaches were so incensed that they toyed with the idea of boycotting NCAA events." Fullinwider goes on:



John Thompson, then-coach of Georgetown University's basketball team, complained that poor minority kids were at a disadvantage taking the "mainstream-oriented" SAT. "Certain kids," he noted just after the federal court's decision, "require individual assessment. Some urban schools cater to poor kids, low-income kids, black and white. To put everybody on the same playing field [i.e., to treat them the same in testing] is just crazy."

Fullinwider writes that the legality of Proposition 16 was challenged in March 1999 on the basis that it was discriminatory to African-American student athletes. However, in its summary of the case *Cureton v. NCAA*, the Marquette University Law School You Make the Call web site explains that the federal courts ultimately decided that Proposition 16 was not a violation of students' civil rights and could be enforced by the NCAA.

With rules like Proposition 48 and Proposition 16, "the old practice of recruiting athletes who are clearly unqualified for admission with the hope that their contributions on the field will be sufficient before their inadequacy in the classroom, slowed somewhat" (Duderstadt 195). However, as facts show today, it seems as if these rules are harder to enforce in some universities than the NCAA originally thought.

There have been many documented instances of athletes being admitted to a university without even coming close to meeting the minimum requirements for academic eligibility set by the NCAA. One such instance happened just one year after Proposition 48 was enacted. North Carolina State University signed Chris Washburn, "one of the most highly recruited high school seniors in the nation" (Cramer K4). Although Washburn proved to be valuable to the team, it was later found out that "his combined score on the SAT was a whopping 470," and that he had "an abysmal academic record in high school" (Cramer K4). Both his



SAT score and his poor grades in high school all fell much lower than the standards set by the NCAA.

According to Art Padilla, former vice president for academic affairs at the University of North Carolina System, student athletes like Chris Washburn are not uncommon at most universities (Cramer K5). He states, "Every major college sports institution has kids with that kind of academic record, and if they deny it, they are lying" (Cramer K5).

The admitting of unqualified students is not the only place where colleges seem to step out of bounds though. Once the athlete has been admitted and signed with the university, for some, a long list of corruption from the university is still to follow when it comes to dealing with their academics.

Furthermore, many universities face a lot of pressure to recruit good players to their schools regardless of their academic skills. Debra Blum reported in 1996 about the case of a star basketball player who wanted to attend Vanderbilt University. As Blum writes, "Vanderbilt denied him (basketball player Ron Mercer) admission, describing his academic record as not up to snuff. So he enrolled at Kentucky, where he helped his team to a national championship last season" (A51). The case of Vanderbilt losing Mercer caused a lot of "soul searching" at Vanderbilt, in part because there was a lot of pressure from "other university constituents, particularly many alumni ... to do what it takes to field more-competitive teams, especially in football and men's basketball" (A51).

But these pressures are also the point where school officials are tempted to break the rules. As John Gerdy wrote in his article "A Suggestion For College Coaches: Teach By Example," in universities where the purpose of recruiting a great athlete is to improve the team, they often claim, "intercollegiate athletics are about education, but it is



obvious that they are increasingly about entertainment, money, and winning" (28).

Mixed messages are sent when some student-athletes "are referred to as "players" and "athletes" rather than "students" and "student-athletes" (Gerdy 28). It is clear that these student-athletes are sometimes only wanted for their athletic ability, and it is also clear that there are sometimes many pressures to recruit such students. As Austin C. Wherwein said, many student athletes "are given little incentive to be scholars and few persons care how the student athlete performs academically, including some of the athletes themselves" (Quoted in Thelin 183).

In some cases, coaches directly encourage students to emphasize their athletic career instead of their studies. One such instance, reported in Sports Illustrated by Austin Murphy, involves an Ohio State tailback, Robert Smith, who quit the football team "saying that coaches had told him he was spending too much time on academics" (Murphy 9). Smith claims that offensive coordinator Elliot Uzelac "encouraged him to skip a summer-school chemistry class because it was causing Smith, who was a pre-med student, to miss football practice" (Murphy 9). Smith did not think this was right so he walked off the team (Murphy 9). Supposedly, "the university expressed support for Uzelac, who denied Smith's allegations" (Murphy 9).

Another way some universities sometimes manage the academic success of their student-athletes is to enroll them in easier classes, particularly those set up specifically for student-athletes. The curriculum for some of these courses is said to be "less than intellectually demanding"(Cramer K2). Jan Kemp, a remedial English professor at the University of Georgia who taught a class with just football players for students, was "troubled by the fact that many of her students seemed incapable



of graduating from college" (Cramer K2). This seems surprising, but in fact some athletes from the University of Georgia "were described as being given more than four chances to pass developmental studies classes" without ever being successful (Cramer K2). Also, "school records show that in an effort to keep athletes playing, several were placed in the regular academic curriculum without having passed even the watered-down classes" (Cramer K2). Although this particular story comes from the University of Georgia, it is not just unique to that school. Many universities have been guilty of doing such things for their athletes just so they could continue to play on the team.

Of course, not all student-athletes are bad students. Many student-athletes actually do well in school and excel both athletically and academically. But although these true "student-athletes" do exist, they are often overshadowed by those negative images of athletes who do not do as well in school. And while all sorts of different sports have had academic problems with their athletes, the majority of corruption at the university level exists in football and basketball teams (Cramer K3). According to Duderstadt, "football and basketball are not holding their own when it comes to student academic honors" (Duderstadt 190). He says "Football and basketball have developed cultures with low expectations for academic performance. For many student-athletes in these sports, athletics are clearly regarded as a higher priority than their academic goals" (Duderstadt 191). So although this label of the bad student-athlete does not even come close to applying to all athletes, some universities are still considered, as John Thelin wrote in his book Games Colleges Play, "academically corrupt and athletically sound" (199).

As James Moore and Sherry Watt say in their essay "Who Are Student Athletes?", the "marriage between higher education and



intercollegiate athletics has been turbulent, and always will be" (7). The NCAA has tried to make scholarly success at least as important as athletic success with requirements like Proposition 48 and Proposition 16. But there are still too many cases where under-prepared students are admitted to college because they can play a sport, and there are too still too many instances where universities let their athletes get away with being poor students because they are a sport superstar. I like cheering for my college team as much as anyone else, but I would rather cheer for college players who were students who worried about learning and success in the classroom, too.



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